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The Hill Cumorah was literally the seedbed of the restoration of the gospel. Its soil held the most important artifact undergirding the work of the Prophet Joseph Smith—the gold plates. A divine messenger, the angel Moroni, came to Joseph Smith, revealing to him the existence and physical location of that sacred record. After it was in Joseph’s possession, other divine influences inspired him to translate it. This marshaling of celestial powers to shepherd the Book of Mormon to its publication is palpably bound to the Hill Cumorah as the ancient repository of the text. In a real sense, the hill anchored the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. So compelling is the story of the appearance of the book, as well as the stories within it, both everlastingly tied to the hill, that they have inspired music and poetry, sculpture and pageant. These outcomes receive fresh attention in this issue.

As time has passed, the Hill Cumorah too has become an artifact of the restoration. As such, it enjoys a distinguished history, not just since the geologic age that first gave to the hill its characteristic shape, but especially since Moroni buried the plates there, conferring on the hill a sacred quality. This unusual quality became evident the moment that Joseph Smith first climbed its western slope to locate the plates. In the first of four studies that explore the last part of this history, Richard Holzapfel and Cameron Packer lead readers along the path of the earliest representations of the hill in visual form, representations that parallel in large measure the development of modern visual arts. Another story about the hill is, of course, how it came into the hands of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. David Boone rehearses Willard Bean’s role in the church’s acquisition of the properties that crisscrossed the hill in the early 20th century. Research by Martin Raish assembles early accounts of the hill as well as the lore, both negative and positive, that had begun to grow up, treating some material not studied heretofore. The fourth study, by Cameron Packer, takes up the tantalizing question about a cave inside the hill that some early church leaders reported visiting in a visionary state.

The Hill Cumorah Pageant has become a staple not only for church members but also for citizens of Palmyra and surrounding communities. Gerald Argetsinger’s history of this event, written from the point of view of a longtime pageant administrator and director, paints the rich portrait of how the pageant has come to its present form. In another account we encounter the engaging firsthand reminiscences of Crawford Gates, who composed the pageant’s memorable music twice—in 1957 and 1988—as the pageant gradually took on its present shape. Rory Scanlon, who is currently responsible for designing and maintaining the costumes for the pageant, sketches out the processes by which he and his predecessors have made the pageant a visually stunning success. The last piece touching on the pageant is a chapter from an unpublished manuscript by the late Harold I. Hansen, a moving force within the pageant for four decades. The Journal thanks Mr. Hansen’s daughter, Mrs. Betty Gibbons, for access to his first-person account of the challenges in restarting the pageant after World War II.

The artistic efforts inspired by the Hill Cumorah are many, and the three treatments of song, poetry, and sculpture only brush the surface of a growing artistic heritage. Roger Miller treats a few of the riches that lie in popular and devotional music, including a few Latter-day Saint hymns. Louise Helps selects 18 poems, the earliest one published in 1833, and deftly elucidates their content and messages. Allen Gerritsen unfolds in intimate detail the monumental effort of his grandfather Torleif Knaphus to sculpt the Angel Moroni Monument that has stood atop the Hill Cumorah since 1935.

In the first of two scientific studies, Michael Dorais spreads before readers the geologic processes that brought the Hill Cumorah into being, showing it to be a product of the last ice age and one of many such drumlins that ripple across northern New York State. John Clark, whose interests lie in the ancient American Olmec culture, uncovers what can be said about the archaeological record of pre-Columbian peoples in eastern Pennsylvania and New York, a record that is surprisingly sparse.

One hundred eighty-one years have passed since Joseph Smith first visited the Hill Cumorah on 22 September 1823. As this double issue of the Journal shows, during the intervening years the hill has drawn to itself artists and scholars, believers and detractors. In this issue, the authors offer to readers a broad, multidimensional view of how the hill has come to play an important role in the outlook of Latter-day Saints, particularly as that outlook ties to the Book of Mormon and its miraculous preservation.
A STORY ON CANVAS, PAPER, & GLASS: The Early Visual Images of Cumorah

RICHARD NEITZEL HOLZAPFEL & CAMERON J. PACKER
IN 1903 PRESIDENT JOSEPH F. SMITH AUTHORIZED THE FIRST PURCHASE OF A HISTORICAL SITE LINKED TO THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS—CARTHAGE JAIL, THE PLACE OF JOSEPH SMITH’S AND HYRUM SMITH’S MARTYRDOMS IN 1844.\(^1\) DURING THE ENSUING DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY, THE CHURCH IDENTIFIED, PURCHASED, MARKED, AND RESTORED NUMEROUS HISTORICAL SITES, INCLUDING THE HILL CUMORAH (AS IT IS KNOWN TODAY) IN MANCHESTER, NEW YORK.\(^2\) THESE PURCHASES HELPED PRESERVE THESE PLACES FOR FUTURE VISITORS WHO WOULD FIND THEIR WAY TO THE SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE RESTORATION OF THE GOSPEL.

Sacred Spaces

Since time immemorial, humans have found meaning and purpose in hallowing sites because of events that transpired there. Jews, for example, continue to gather and pray at the Kotel, “the [Western] Wall,” in the Old City of Jerusalem.\(^3\) Likewise, Muslims hold sacred an area near this spot because of its association with the Prophet Muhammad (the rock under the Dome of the Rock).\(^4\) Such sites offer an opportunity for pilgrims to visit places that have become hallowed. As Mircea Eliade wrote, “Every sacred space implies . . . an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.”\(^5\)

A Latter-day Saint Approach

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ have tried not to create shrines or pilgrimage sites per se. President Gordon B. Hinckley articulated what the Latter-day Saint perspective should be regarding our own sacred historical sites when he dedicated sites in Palmyra in 1998: “They’re not shrines. We don’t worship them, but we respect them and honor them and like the common feel of the spirit that’s to be found in them. . . . Our roots are here.”\(^6\)

In fact, the burgeoning interest in church historical sites manifested by North American Saints should be understood in the context of American culture. U.S. and Canadian citizens enjoy visiting museums and historical sites. American Latter-day Saints, sharing similar interests, often combine a visit to church historical sites with a visit to significant American historical sites. Like other religious people in the United States who make such visits, Latter-day Saints often experience deep religious attachment to sacred places where significant events occurred.

Word Pictures of Cumorah (1830s)

In the early 19th century, however, relatively few people traveled for tourism or pleasure. The few who were able to visit sites associated with the early years of Mormonism naturally provided word pictures or visual presentations for those, both the curious and the devout, who did not have the opportunity to visit the sites.

Of all these sites, the Hill Cumorah stands out because of its natural prominence in the religious and physical landscape of western New York. W. W. Phelps wrote: “Cumorah . . . must become as
famous among the latter day saints, as Sinai was among the former day saints . . . [a] glorious
spot!—sacred depository! out of thee came the glad
tidings which will rejoice thousands! . . . Cumorah . . . is well calculated to stand in this generation, as a
monument of marvelous works and wonders.⁷

The hill is a primary connection to the Latter-
day Saints' sacred past for several reasons. Most
obviously, Joseph Smith obtained the sacred record,
published as the Book of Mormon, from this site. In
addition, 19th- and many 20th-century Saints as-
sociated the hill with the final battles between the
Nephites and Lamanites (Cumorah) and the site of
the final battles of the Jaredites (Ramah), both men-
tioned in the Book of Mormon (see Mormon 6:2;
Ether 15:11). Furthermore, the hill's concrete na-
ture—it cannot be burned or torn down, it cannot
be moved—gives a certain defined boundary to the
events of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Oliver Cowdery, who visited the hill in 1830,
provided members of the church with one of the
earliest descriptions of the hill. This was printed in
several letters published in the church’s newspaper,
the Messenger and Advocate, in Kirtland, beginning
in February 1835.⁸ In a subsequent letter, Cowdery
included a reference to the size of the hill, men-
tioned in most accounts: “I think I am justified in
saying that this is the highest hill for some distance
round, and I am certain that its appearance, as it
rises so suddenly from a plain on the north, must
attract the notice of the traveller as he passes by.”⁹

Similar word pictures emerged during the next
decades—each providing varying details regarding
the changing face of Cumorah but all noting
its shape and size. Certainly one of the reasons that
Latter-day Saints took the time to record descrip-
tions and capture visual images of Cumorah is best
summarized by one visitor in the early 1880s: “I
presume no Latter-day Saint has ever visited the
Hill Cumorah but that he felt impressed to thank
God for the principles which came forth from it.”¹⁰

The First Visual Image of Cumorah (1841)

Non-Mormons John Warner Barber (1798–
1885) and Henry Howe (1816–93) gave to the public
the first visual representation of Cumorah when
they published their Historical Collections of the
State of New York in 1841.¹¹ Barber and Howe trav-
eled throughout New York State gathering material
for their book, traversing thousands of miles (hun-
dreds of it on foot).

The 230 illustrations that make this historical
record so distinctive were prepared from original
“drawings taken on the spot by the compilers of the
work,” whose principal object “was to give faithful
representations, rather than picturesque views, or
beautiful specimens of art.”¹²

Image 1 “The Mormon Hill,” 1841; north slope, looking south.¹³ The lengthy caption, printed below the woodcut, reads: “The above is a
northern view of the Mormon Hill in the town of Manchester, about 3 miles in a southern direction from Palmyra. It is about 140 feet in height
[recent calculations suggest the height of the peak to be about 117 feet above ground level],¹⁴ and is a specimen of the form of numerous el-
evations in this section of the state. It derives its name from being the spot (if we are to credit the testimony of Joseph Smith) where the plates
containing the Book of Mormon were found.”
The Hill Cumorah Fences (1841–1935)

When comparing visual images of the Hill Cumorah from 1841 (the first visual image) through 1935 (when the Hill Cumorah Monument was dedicated), it becomes obvious that a close examination of fence construction can provide a clue to dating the images. The first fences to appear on and around the hill are split-rail fences (see image 1 opposite). The next type appears to be a post and rail fence (see image 11a). At some time, wire fences were introduced (see image 8). The final development is the addition of a picket fence (see image 9). One problem, however, was that sections of the fence line may have been replaced piecemeal. As a result, a photograph can depict three of the four fence types in one image (see image 8).

Departure from Cumorah (1831–47)

By 1841, when a woodcut of “The Mormon Hill” appeared in print (image 1), the church had moved from its birthplace in New York, setting up its headquarters on the banks of the Mississippi River in Illinois and gathering converts from Canada, the United States, and the British Isles.¹⁵ The physical distance between the body of the church and the hill continued to increase as time passed. By 1847 church headquarters were located in Salt Lake City, some 2,000 miles from Cumorah. Even though the Saints were busy building a new society in the West, church leaders, some of whom were well acquainted with the topographical landscape of the restoration of the gospel, continued to recall the places and stories of the early days of the restoration. The words of these leaders helped to further define the hill as a sacred place, etching it forever in the Saints’ minds as a holy place—as Phelps suggested, a veritable Mount Sinai.¹⁶

The First Photograph of Cumorah (1853)

Shortly after Cowdery began to publish his descriptions of Cumorah in 1834, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre announced the first fully successful and feasible photographic process—named daguerreotype after him—to the French Academy of Science, in January 1839. This was a powerful new medium, allowing photographic images of people, places, and events. With this new technology available, it was inevitable that eventually someone would take camera in hand and capture the famous Mormon landmark where Joseph Smith found the golden plates.¹⁷ The earliest documented photograph of Cumorah was an early daguerreotype, taken in the fall of 1853. While the original has been lost, the view was preserved through a printed illustration (image 2), based on the original image, which appeared in the popular Frank Leslie’s New Family Magazine in February 1858, a period when the American public’s attention was focused on Utah Territory during the so-called Utah War (1857–58).

Frank Leslie (1821–80) had been the superintendent of the Engraving Department of the famous Illustrated London News (founded in 1842), the first successful attempt to provide readers images of people, places, and events along with written news accounts. Following his arrival in the United States, Leslie worked for several illustrated newspapers in America, including the well-known Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion, where he had provided an early view of Brigham Young to the nation. Eventually, Leslie started his own publishing empire, including the Frank Leslie’s New Family Magazine. Over the next 20 years, Leslie’s illustrated newspapers highlighted the Latter-day Saint movement and its key figures, including Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.¹⁸ His efforts to provide images and text together, like other publishers of the period, were based on taking original photographs (at first daguerreotypes and later albumen prints) and making, by hand, woodcuts and steel engravings that could be reproduced in his newspapers.

Leslie not only provided his readers an early view of Cumorah, and the earliest view based on a photograph, he provided subscribers contextual information about the view of the famous hill: “By the kindness of H. K. Heydon, Esq., living at Newark, Wayne co., New York, we are able to present to our readers a daguerreotype view of the spot where the plates were buried, and subsequently exhumed. Mr. Heydon says that the view was taken by him in the fall of 1853. The hill is on the plank road leading from Palmyra to Canandaigua, and just four miles from the first named place. The view is of the north side, which is the highest and steepest part, as the hill running south gradually descends until it is lost in the plains. Joe Smith

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dug in the earth, but says he found the plates while ploughing. The hole, at the time the daguerreotype was taken, was still visible (it can be just seen in our engraving, on the right of the house, as you ascend the hill); though most filled up, there was a little knoll and a slight depression still apparent in the sod. The authenticity of the picture makes it deservedly interesting. Strange to say, although Joe Smith, according to his own statement, had seen the plates, he was not permitted to obtain possession of them until the 22d of September 1827, and then, not until after a great deal of negotiation between him and the angel, were they placed in his possession.”

Following the time of Daguerre's announcement in 1839, many woodcuts and steel engravings appearing in newspapers and books were actually based on photographs. However, once an image was in the possession of an engraver, there was no guarantee that the finished product would be a perfect replica of the original. Without the original, it is impossible to know if this illustration is an exact copy or not.

An LDS Visual Image of Cumorah (1878)

The first Latter-day Saint artist to paint the Hill Cumorah, whose works survive, was C. C. A. Christensen. His interpretation, completed in 1878, was an effort to help the Saints visualize the sacred story they knew so well. As Richard L. Jensen and Richard G. Oman note, “C. C. A. Christensen helped Latter-day Saints see their religious history in biblical terms. The parallel with Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai [and Joseph Smith receiving the ancient record from Moroni on Cumorah] is obvious.”

Carl Christian Anton Christensen (1831–1912) was a Danish immigrant and one of several first-generation artists in Utah to utilize the panorama phenomenon, an art form that was popular in both the United States and Europe during the middle- and late-19th century. C. C. A., as he was known, attended the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen before joining the church in 1850. He made his way to Utah in 1857, eventually settling in Sanpete County. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, C. C. A.
began creating four panoramas dealing with religious subject matter. His best known, “Mormon Panorama,” depicts the early history of the church.

Apparently, C. C. A. did not actually visit any of the church history sites from the Joseph Smith period (such as Liberty Jail, Carthage Jail, and the Nauvoo Temple). The fact that in some cases his paintings closely depict the actual sites suggests that he carefully read eyewitness accounts, spoke with individuals who had seen the sites, and looked at earlier illustrations of some of the places before painting his panorama.

Once completed, “Mormon Panorama” contained 23 panels. This series of paintings was stitched together vertically to form one continuous canvas roll, allowing C. C. A. to present his panorama to an audience by scrolling through the scenes as he narrated the events. He also involved his audience in singing specific hymns corresponding with scenes from the panorama. By allowing the audience to participate in this way, C. C. A. was able to bring his paintings to life, helping the audience feel as if they were present at the locations and events unfolding before them.

The second panel of the panorama focuses on Joseph Smith obtaining the plates in September 1827 (image 3). It is human nature, perhaps, that people wanted to know the exact location where Joseph found the plates. Although the Prophet provided a general description of the location during his lifetime (see Joseph Smith—History 1:51), contemporary sources indicate that he may have been even more specific, allowing associates to visit the exact location.

One tradition identifying the exact site continued to be passed along among church members. As a result, many photographs that seem to be simply group photos are actually an effort to document the group’s presence at the exact spot where the ancient record was found. Most of these photographs focus on an area about two-thirds of the way up the hill on the west side, near the north end. Similarly, C. C. A. drew the attention of his audience to this specific depiction of Cumorah, focusing on the traditional spot where Joseph met Moroni in 1827.

Another Photograph of Cumorah (1880)

Another early photograph of Cumorah was taken in May 1880 by an unknown photographer at

![Image 3](The Hill Cumorah, C. C. A. Christensen, tempera on canvas, 204.5 x 294.6 cm (80.5” x 116”), ca. 1878. By 1878 the hill had been stripped of its natural forest, except for seven large trees near the top. The artist, therefore, depicts the hill as it would have been in 1827. Dawn Pheysey, curator at the BYU Museum of Art, for an exhibition in 2003, wrote: “Moroni appears to Joseph as a heavenly personage dressed in a white robe and surrounded by intense light. The rays of light that emanate from his body are a symbol of divinity borrowed from late Renaissance and Baroque paintings. Vertical tree trunks frame the two figures and create a sense of stability and calm in stark contrast to the energetic diagonal thrust of the steep incline and leaning trees.” Courtesy of Brigham Young University Museum of Art. All rights reserved.)
the behest of Franklin D. Richards, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who was visiting church history sites at the time. Junius Free Wells (1854–1930) and Edward Stevenson (1820–97) produced engravings of the hill based on Richards’s photographs (images 4 and 5), and the Latter-day Saints thus had an opportunity to see versions of the photographs in print.

Franklin D. Richards visited Cumorah in May 1880 and recorded in his journal: “Good night’s rest—breakfasted early & all 5 of us took train for ‘Palmyra’ where we put up at ‘Palmyra Hotel.’ Hired a livery team & went to ‘Cumorah’—‘Ramah’ then to Manchester. . . . Returned to Cumorah. Artist took 8 [3] views, 2 were pretty good.”²⁴

When he returned to Utah, Richards reported to President John Taylor on 9 June. “Went by 9:40 train to city [Salt Lake City]—and was cordially welcomed back again by President Taylor & others in the office. Took some time to report to him the various phases of my journey, my visits & business transactions. . . . At 2 p.m. met in council with J. T. [John Taylor], O. P. [Orson Pratt], W. W. [Willford Woodruff], D. H. W. [Daniel H. Wells], J. F. S. [Joseph F. Smith], A. C. [Albert Carrington] & reported generally my labors & travels. Showing my views of Ramah-Cumorah.”²⁵ On the following day, Richards met with family members who had not accompanied him on the trip. “Went to Farmington by 3:40 [train] visited with the family & showed them the views of ‘Cumorah’—‘Ramah’ & etc.”²⁶

These precious photographs of Cumorah were shown to others and were made available to the general church membership for the first time in 1883 through the reproduction of one of them in the form of a steel engraving in the church’s Contributor magazine.

In his 1893 book Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, Stevenson used a painting for his illustration of the Hill Cumorah that was based on Richards’s 1880 photograph. His account provides a vivid description of the Hill Cumorah, supplemented imaginatively: “Just for a moment cast your eye on the engraving, which is the one of my choice, exhibiting, as it does, a north front, and to my mind the most lovely view of all.”²⁷ He continues: “The one presented is from a painting made from a photograph which Apostle Franklin D. Richards had taken during his visit there a few years ago (1880). The group seen upon the hillside consists of himself, wife [Jane Snyder Richards], sons Lorenzo and Charles, and Joseph A. West, besides the owner of the ground.”²⁸
Exactly how close the painting Stevenson used is to the original photograph may never be known, as Richards’s entire collection of photographs taken of Cumorah in 1880 has disappeared.

An Early Photograph of Cumorah (1889)

Until H. K. Heydon’s and Franklin D. Richards’s photographs are found, the earliest photographic view of Cumorah available is most likely one taken by the Syracuse, New York, photographic partnership of Smith and Coatsworth.

Frank G. Smith (ca. 1856–1932) and Edward E. Coatsworth (ca. 1841–?) were partners from 1889 until 1894 or 1895. Like other portrait photographers of the period, they indulged in landscape photography.
as well. One or both of them traveled the 60 miles from their home in Syracuse to Manchester, New York, where they captured the famous Mormon historical site in the fall of 1889.³³

Sixty-seven years later, Elizabeth Power Smith donated this historic image (image 6), along with two other early images of Cumorah (images 12a and 12b), to the Ontario County Historical Society in Canandaigua, New York. These images were passed down through her family until she donated them to the historical society in April 1957.³⁴

Another LDS Painting of Cumorah (1892)

In the early 1890s, the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ commissioned several Utah artists to create paintings, including mural work, for the nearly completed Salt Lake Temple.³⁵ Among those who were offered commissions was Alfred Lambourne (1850–1926). Lambourne, like C. C. A. Christensen, was an immigrant convert to the church. He left his native England for Utah when he was 16 years old. Lambourne eventually contributed two paintings for the Salt Lake Temple, “The Hill Cumorah” in New York and “Adam-ondi-Ahman” in Missouri.³⁶

Unlike C. C. A., Lambourne went to the sites he painted, returning from his epic trip to church history sites on 29 September 1892.³⁷ The Deseret Evening News noted: “Mr. Alfred Lambourne, the well-known Utah artist, has just returned from an extensive trip. He visited New York, Boston, Salem, Albany, Rochester, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Chicago. . . . But the most interesting of all the places he had an opportunity of viewing was the Hill Cumorah and Adam-ondi-ah-man. . . . Mr. Lambourne made elaborate sketches of each, and the result of his eastern trip will be productive of artistic results.”³⁸

Lambourne visited President Wilford Woodruff in mid-November 1892 to show him the completed work.³⁹ The aging church president noted: “I spent the day in the office. Met with Several Brethren. I had a view of the painting By Alfred Lambourne of the Hill Comorah which was a Beautiful painting.”⁴⁰

The painting shows the hill at the break of dawn, allowing Lambourne to use the sunlight to symbolize how the message of the Book of Mormon, like the sunrise, breaks forth and scatters “the dark clouds of night.”⁴¹ Additionally, he used the wind, as seen by the moving clouds, swaying trees, and falling leaves, to demonstrate the strife associated with Cumorah—not only the strife of past ages, as detailed in the Book of Mormon, but also that which began in earnest the night Joseph Smith obtained the plates. Additionally, Lambourne used the fall scenery to remind the viewer that Joseph Smith’s yearly visits occurred in late September.⁴³

Image 7  Hill Cumorah. by Alfred Lambourne, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 188 cm (35” x 74”), 1892. Instead of trying to show the hill as it actually existed, Lambourne’s painting depicts the doctrinal and historical significance of the place. He noted that it was not to be “an ordinary commonplace everyday effect.”⁴⁴ Courtesy of Museum of Church History and Art, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.
Grazing on the Hill (1895)

Charles Levi Joy (1869–1943) began his photographic career in American Fork, Utah, and eventually continued his business in Salt Lake City in 1915. Sometime in the mid-1890s, Joy took his 8” x 10” view camera to New York and captured the hill during the middle stage of its three important modern phases. The first phase was the 1820s, when the hill was virtually a pristine site where Joseph found the ancient records. The second phase, which is shown here, was the period of human exploitation, when the wood was already harvested and the hill was being used to graze animals to support a working farm. The third phase, which began after the church’s purchase of the hill, was an attempt to reforest the hill to provide visitors with a sense of what it was like when Joseph visited there in 1823 and simultaneously to offer access to the story of the hill via walkways, a monument, and a visitors’ center.

Besides highlighting the grazing of sheep and some horses, Joy provided a window to the stages of development of the fences that divided the land. Joy’s photograph preserves a view of the much earlier split-rail fence, which intersected a wire fence that cuts across the hill diagonally. Note the post and rail fences at the base of the hill and the nearly parallel fence line above it (following a farm road, hidden by the tall grasses of the field in the foreground). Finally, his photograph shows two separate wire fences: one with a board base, the fence running diagonally across the hill; and one with a rock base, near where he set up his photographic equipment.

Additionally, Joy’s large-format print demonstrates a typical practice of photographers from this period. Note the printed words “The Hill Cumorah copyrighted by C. L. Joy,” which appear as part of the print. Joy did not add these words to the print; they were part of the information etched into the emulsion on the original glass plate negative, allowing him to provide contextual and interpretative information to the viewer.

Image 8  “The Hill Cumorah,” C. L. Joy, ca. 1895; looking south at the north end. Joy captures the hill in its primary use at this period: a pasture for sheep and horses. As one of the earliest views of the north end of the hill (a view often chosen by early photographers), this photograph acts as an important reference to the developing fence lines and vegetation on the hill. Courtesy of Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter Church Archives.
A Mass-Market Image of Cumorah (1904)

At the turn of the 20th century, news and feature articles and accompanying visual illustrations about the church were usually negative, especially during the period of the Reed Smoot Senate hearings (1904–6). However, the largest collection of surviving American stereoscopic photographs includes a 1904 set of articles and illustrations about Mormon historical sites, surprisingly free of libel and scorn, titled “The Latter Day Saints’ Tour from Palmyra, New York to Salt Lake City, Utah through the Stereoscope.” In fact, through its selection of subjects and details, the non-Mormon firm of Underwood and Underwood subtly reshaped the Mormon image by placing it squarely in the mainstream of American values—no longer emphasizing the differences between Utah and the rest of the nation but rather the similarities between them.

Stereoscopic images are two slightly different views of the same scene that, when viewed side by side through a stereoscope—an instrument with two eyepieces—create a three-dimensional effect in a single image. Scenes that appear flat and uninteresting as simple photographs assume three-dimensional reality in stereo. Millions of armchair travelers enjoyed countless hours of entertainment from this medium, many taking their first look at the world beyond their own neighborhoods.

The boxed set of 29 views from Underwood and Underwood was photographed and marketed three years before Utah photographer George Edward Anderson’s celebrated pilgrimage to church historic sites in 1907.

In light of Mormonism’s changing status in America, both the creation and the content of these stereographs are historically important. The “Latter Day Saints’ Tour” was the first attempt by a professional photographer to document the Latter-day Saint movement from New York to the Great Basin and provided non–Latter-day Saints with one of the few friendly views of Mormon history at the time.

The Joseph Smith Centennial Party View of Cumorah (1905)

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s birth, in December 1905, President Joseph F. Smith invited several church leaders and family members to join him on a trip to Sharon, Vermont, where he dedicated the Joseph Smith Memorial. They visited other church sites during their travels, including the Hill Cumorah.

The longtime owner of the hill, Admiral William T. Sampson, had died recently in 1902. During the following year (1903), his widow deeded the property to Pliny T. Sexton. Admiral Sampson’s brother, George Sampson, lived as a tenant on the property at the time.
of the visit of Joseph F. Smith party in 1905. Edith Smith, one of President Smith’s daughters, wrote this description of the trip: “Arriving at the [George] Sampson home near the foot of the hill, we were informed that the gentleman was not at home, but his wife, though somewhat reluctantly, gave her consent [to visit]. Pres. [Francis M.] Lyman suggested we climb the steepest part at the north end. It proved to be quite a climb... From the summit we found we had a fine view of the surrounding country... Some pictures were taken.”

Edith Smith also provided a clue about the individual responsible for the photographs taken on the trip: “George A. took quite a number of Kodak pictures.” George Albert Smith (1870–1951), one of the memorial trip organizers and one of the Twelve Apostles, brought along his Kodak camera. Edith also mentioned another photographer among the group, Benjamin Goddard (1851–1930), manager of the Salt Lake City Bureau of Information. However, a careful examination of the image suggests George Albert Smith was the photographer, because he does not appear to be in the photograph.

A Postcard of Cumorah (1905)

Plain postcards appeared in the United States as early as 1841, followed by the first government postcards in 1873. America’s first official picture postcards were sold at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Between 1901 and 1907, the so-called “undivided back” postcard era began. These postcards often displayed a photograph on one side (usually designated as the front) and a space for only an address on the other side (usually identified as the back). It was against the law to write a message on the address side, so people often wrote over the image on the front side of the postcard.

Images 11a and 11b Front and back: “Hill Cumorah, where Joseph Smith found the golden plates of the Book of Mormon in 1823,” postcard ca. 1905, based on an earlier photographic image, ca. late 1890s; looking southeast at northwest end. Color was added to the postcard during the printing stage in an effort to produce a “natural” view. This postcard was sold by Frank H. Leib, a postcard dealer in Salt Lake City, and was printed in Germany (where nearly 75 percent of all cards were printed at the time). Someone has written in black ink on the right side, “A sacred spot in Mormon history, Leo, Jan. 5, 06,” providing additional interpretive information to the printed caption. Courtesy of Gary and Carolyn Ellsworth, Madera, California.
Two Different Views of the Hill (1906)

Elizabeth Power Smith, as noted previously, donated three images of Cumorah to the Ontario County Historical Society in Canandaigua, New York (see image 6). Two of the three do not have a date or photographer’s name associated with them. The photographic images (5 ¾” x 3 ¾”) are glued onto the same decorated card stock (7” x 6”). Their exact date is unknown; however, a careful examination of the fences shown in one of the two images (image 12b) suggests a date around 1906.

From Gold Plates to Glass Plates (1907)

Within two years, another pilgrim made his way to the sites associated with Joseph Smith’s ministry. George Edward Anderson (1860–1928) was not the first photographer to dream of a complete photographic record of the rise of the Church of Jesus Christ, but he was the first professional Latter-day Saint photographer to travel from the West to the East to begin the effort. He is arguably the most important photographer of church historical sites to date, both in number of photographs and their quality.

Anderson was called to serve as a full-time missionary to Great Britain and took the opportunity, with approval from the Brethren, to make a photographic record of church history sites on his way. These photographs were important for a Utah-born generation of church members who had heard the stories of the early Saints but who were generally unable to visit the sites where the events took place.

Anderson, known as Ed or Eddy throughout his life, carried with him the heavy camera and glass plates of his trade in what would become a nearly seven-year odyssey before returning home to Springville, Utah. He spent one year photographing
historic sites in the United States (1907–8), three years in Great Britain as a missionary (1908–11), and nearly two more years continuing his photographic work in the United States (1911–13) before finally returning to Utah.

After traversing the dew-laden fields, packing his heavy 8” x 10” view camera, he noted in his diary, “Rose before sunup, and by the time the rays lit up the landscape, I had my camera from the other side of the hill (where I left it last night) and ready to make pictures. Made several negatives from different points. . . . One or two more negatives of the hill and visited the top.”

Unlike the landscape artist, Anderson was enthralled by the capability of photographs to show a person, place, or event realistically—instead of the idealized view often found in paintings. However, Anderson, like other photographers of the period, was frustrated by the fact that his photographs could not replicate the natural colors of his views. He finished his entry for 14 August 1905: “Need the painter’s hand to do it justice and fix the colors.”

Another Postcard of Cumorah (1910)

Beginning in 1907, the “divided back” postcard era began, when the U.S. government allowed the address side of postcards to be divided into two sections (one for the address and the other reserved for written messages; see image 15b).

During this period, some companies, including the Rochester News Company in Rochester, New York, obtained several images of Cumorah and reproduced them over and over again. One photograph with three individuals (two standing and one seated) is found in several formats, including a black-and-white photograph that had been tinted, giving it the appearance of a color photograph, a later development in the photographic process.

An Early RLDS View (1912)

Due to the establishment of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1860 (RLDS—known today as the Community of Christ),
another group emerged claiming a special connection with Cumorah. RLDS membership included those who had been members of the Church of Jesus Christ during the Joseph Smith period, a new generation born to those early members, and new converts. Like Latter-day Saints from the West, RLDS members made their way to the Hill Cumorah, and in their turn provided word pictures of their own.⁵⁷

Members of the RLDS Church were also interested in producing visual images of church history sites. One of the earliest images in the Community of Christ Library–Archives is dated 22 October 1912 (image 16). The first printed view of the Hill Cumorah in an RLDS publication appeared in 1914 and was based on a late 1890s photograph (see image 11a).⁵⁸

The Bean Family Album (1915–39)

In 1915 Willard and Rebecca Bean were called by President Joseph F. Smith to oversee the Smith farm in Manchester (Palmyra area), recently purchased by the church.⁵⁹ The presence of this Latter-day Saint family and the subsequent purchase of the Hill Cumorah by the church between 1923 and 1928 provided a new period of visitation, commemoration, and documentation of the site.

The following photographs (images 17 and 18) are taken from the Bean family photograph album in possession of Palmyra Bean Packer. She was born shortly after Willard and Rebecca arrived in New York (hence her first name). Presumably, these photographs were taken by Willard Bean (1868–1949).

Another LDS View of Cumorah (1920)

In 1910 New York native William Samuel Kline (1876–1961) established Fellowcrafts Shop in Albany, New York, where he did portrait and landscape
photography. He and his family (wife Almira Heeney Kline and son Mitchell Heeney Kline) joined the Church of Jesus Christ on 28 April 1918. Soon thereafter, William turned his camera toward Manchester. During the second and third decades of the 20th century, Kline’s Fellowcrafts Shop produced dozens of images of people and events associated with the church historic sites and celebrations in New York, including Cumorah (see image 19).

Cumorah at the Centennial (1923)

Elbert Aoriul Smith (1871–1959), the son of David Hyrum Smith (Joseph and Emma Smith’s...
son born after the martyrdom), shared an interest in the arts with his father. David Hyrum captured scenes in Nauvoo through a paintbrush, and Elbert captured church history scenes through the lens of his camera. His photograph of the Hill Cumorah (image 20) is one of the earliest images taken by an avid RLDS photographer.

Lantern Glass Slide (1920s)

Ten years following Daguerre’s astonishing announcement in Paris, lantern glass slides were introduced, allowing the recently discovered medium of photography to be seen in an entirely new format. As a transparent slide projected onto a surface, the photograph could now be viewed not only by individuals and small groups but also by a large audience. The new larger scale expanded the utility of photographs, changing the result from an intimate medium to one that was appropriate for entertainment and educational purposes. The lantern glass slides eventually had great impact on educational lectures because everyone could simultaneously view the topic of discussion.

One of the earliest views of Cumorah preserved in this format is located in the W. O. Hands glass slide collection, housed in the Community of Christ Library–Archives in Independence, Missouri. Hands, a dedicated member of the RLDS Church, received permission from RLDS Church president Fredrick M. Smith to tour RLDS congregations in the central states and Canada to deliver a lecture series, including “a 40 min. slide talk on the History of our church.” During 73 exhausting days, Hands traveled as a volunteer missionary, delivering his three-hour-long lecture series some 63 times. He finally returned home to Kansas City on 23 March 1931, having traveled nearly 5,000 miles.
The Hill Cumorah (1935)

Three factors contributed to the proliferation of photographic images of Cumorah beginning in the 1920s. First, increasingly inexpensive photographic costs, including small, handheld cameras, allowed nonprofessional photographers to utilize the new invention. Second, the increased mobility of North American Saints meant that more and more of them traveled to church history sites. Third, the increasing financial independence of the Church of Jesus Christ allowed church leaders to purchase the Hill Cumorah in sections over a period of five years (1923–28).

The centennial celebrations of 1923 and 1927 and the dedication of the Hill Cumorah Monument in 1935 continued to raise the awareness and interest of the Saints in the New York sites associated with the restoration.66 As a result, during the ensuing decades hundreds of thousands of people visited this site, many producing images of Cumorah now housed in private and institutional holdings throughout North America.

The face of the Hill Cumorah changed as human contact left its indelible mark during the 19th and early 20th centuries, changed forever from the condition seen by Joseph Smith in the 1820s. Following the church’s purchase of the hill, Willard Bean began the process of reforestation in 1928—attempting to recapture the appearance of the hill as Joseph Smith first encountered it more than 100 years earlier. Additional improvement projects completed during this time included two flagstone paths and a 6 percent grade road to the summit allowing easy access to the top of Cumorah by the increasing number of visitors. The result was a dramatic change in what photographers and visitors encountered when they came to Manchester following the important decades of the 1920s and 1930s.

Many of the images in this article—along with the Hill Cumorah Pageant (“America’s Witness for Christ”), hymns such as “An Angel from on High,”67 the repetition of the sacred story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Mormon itself—will ensure that the light breaking forth from the Hill Cumorah will continue to brighten our religious landscape. As W. W. Phelps wrote so many years ago, the hill in New York will “stand in this generation, as a monument of marvelous works and wonders.”68
In February 1915 Willard Washington Bean entered a chapel in Richfield, Utah, where a stake conference was about to commence. Willard’s new bride of just over five months, Rebecca Peterson Bean, was already on the stand because she was in the choir that was to furnish music for the conference. Upon Willard’s entry into the chapel shortly before the meeting started, President Joseph F. Smith stood, moved to the podium, and asked, “Will Willard Bean please come to the stand?” Willard complied, and President Smith said to him, “I’ve got another mission for you. After this service is over, I’ll tell you all about it.”

We can only guess at the thoughts that coursed through Willard’s mind during the conference session. Perhaps he thought to excuse himself from further service because he had already completed four full-time missions for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And while he had enjoyed and even excelled in each of these opportunities, he could have reasoned he had done his duty...
and could therefore be excused from filling another mission and be at liberty to get on with his life, which for him consisted of tending to his family and pursuing education and a professional career. If these were his ambitions, they would have to wait indefinitely because President Smith was about to extend to Willard another opportunity to serve.

Within a few days following the Richfield conference, Willard and Rebecca traveled to Salt Lake City, where President Smith explained to them that the church had acquired the Joseph Smith Sr. farm in Manchester, two miles south of Palmyra, New York, and needed someone to go there, oversee the farm, and represent the church.

In December 1907, a little over a century since Joseph Smith’s birth, Latter-day Saint apostle George Albert Smith (a grandnephew of the Prophet and a cousin of church president Joseph F. Smith) purchased the Joseph Smith Sr. farm from William Avery Chapman. Chapman had inherited the farm from his father, Seth, who had purchased it in 1875 from Charles W. and Elvira Bennett. Within the agreement to sell the farm to President Smith, Chapman secured a promise that he could remain on the property until he could find a suitable place to relocate. After more than seven years, Chapman found another home, and the church began looking for someone to oversee the property. Willard Bean seemed unusually qualified to undertake that assignment. For one thing, as a seasoned missionary, he had an excellent knowledge of the gospel and of church history and doctrine. He was also known to church leaders for his loyalty and integrity. Further, Willard was tenacious, if not obstinate, and when necessary he was also a fighter, both figuratively and literally.

The Beans were to live in the Smiths’ frame home, farm the land, and, if possible, befriend the local inhabitants. Making friends there would not be easy; indeed, while in the office of the First Presidency, Willard was told that “Palmyra was the most prejudiced place on earth” and that the local antagonism was directed against the church and its members. In addition, Bean was advised “to be in no hurry to begin missionary work, but to wait until we had made friends and were sure of our ground.”

On 24 February 1915, Willard arrived in Palmyra alone and, as future events would manifest, friendless and something of a Mormon pioneer in reverse. His family, consisting of his wife Rebecca and two children by a previous marriage, Paul and Phyllis, joined him within a short time. Together they began life again, but none of them were perhaps prepared for the opposition they were to experience and the antagonism President Smith had warned them of.
Palmyra

Upstate New York has long held a magnetism for Latter-day Saints worldwide and for other students of Mormon history. The region surrounding Palmyra, Manchester, and Fayette is known as the “Cradle of Mormonism” because of the events that surrounded the restoration of the gospel and combined to bring about the organization of the church in this dispensation. In what would become another memorable chapter in that rich history, the Bean family was called to live in Palmyra to help overcome decades of bitter and hostile feelings so that future Latter-day Saints would have the opportunity to return to the site of their spiritual beginnings.

Joseph Smith Sr. and his family settled in Palmyra in 1816 because he believed that he could make a living and create a new beginning for his family, who had moved 10 times in about a 20-year period because of intemperate climate, crop failure, financial reversals, poverty, and physical misfortune. Many Latter-day Saints believe that the successive moves were part of a divine timetable to ultimately locate the family where Joseph Smith Jr. would be in the right place at the right time to assist in the restoration of the gospel.

Most of the early members of the church had left New York by the close of 1831 to follow their prophet-leader, Joseph Smith, to a new gathering place in northern Ohio. The few Saints who returned to visit Palmyra over the ensuing decades, and the fewer converts who had remained behind were unable to maintain a viable church presence there. With the body of the church gone from the area, bigotry, prejudice, and hatred grew against anything related to Mormonism; and the citizens began to believe ever more fantastic stories against the Smith family, the church, and its members. After nearly three-quarters of a century, the church would attempt to reestablish itself in this inhospitable setting that Latter-day Saints honored for the foundational events that took place there and for the sites that are so much a part of the faith’s colorful past.

Early Setbacks and Opposition

Arriving in New York ahead of his family, Willard occupied the Smith home and began to purchase supplies, livestock, and equipment to run the historic Joseph Smith Sr. farm, which was to provide a living for the family. Money for this venture was apparently initially provided by the church, but the Bean family was financially on its own except for projects initiated by the church or undertaken to help establish the church in New York.

Willard soon learned firsthand that “a prophet hath no honor in his own country,” for the Prophet Joseph Smith was still held in derision in Palmyra, where he was the “butt of ridicule and neighborhood jokes.” In this the Beans saw the literal fulfillment of Moroni’s prophecy to Joseph Smith that “God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). Upon their arrival in Palmyra, Willard’s family were likewise ridiculed for being Mormons and “became [the] objects of curiosity and local gossip, [and were] noticeably shunned.” All family members were affected by this ostracization.

In those days Palmyra’s public library had “one whole shelf [devoted to] anti-Mormon books, some of which were vicious in tone,” Willard noted. Repeated attempts to provide Latter-day Saint literature for a balanced view of Mormonism were quickly and flatly denied. Willard recalled the case he made to the librarian: “I explained that when I wished to know something [about] the Catholic Church I would consult something official gotten out by some reputable Catholic; likewise the Methodist, Presbyterian or any other church.” Willard further noted that “it would be naturally expected that you would have a copy of the Book of Mormon on your shelves, a book published in Palmyra, [which] had wider circulation than any other book, except the Bible.”

After his initial rejection, Willard took his appeal to the council that determined library policy, but his request to place a copy of the Book of Mormon was again turned down because, in the council’s view, “it was . . . a [Mormon] scheme . . . to get that damnable book on our shelves where our young people will have access to it. It will poison their minds against all that is Christian and good.”

Soon thereafter the librarian died, “and without renewing my request,” Willard recalled, “I received a friendly note telling me that the objection to
placing a Book of Mormon in the library had been removed, and [if] I was still desirous of presenting them with a copy, it will be thankfully received.”¹⁵

A special library edition of the Book of Mormon was sent from Salt Lake City, and Willard personally delivered it to the Palmyra village library.

Willard’s fervor to defend the church sometimes took physical form. Rebecca remembered the following incident: “One day my husband was going down main street in Palmyra towards the business district and a man was watering his lawn. . . . He saw my husband coming and said to him, ‘I understand you people [Mormons] believe in baptism by immersion,’ and turned the hose on him.”¹⁶ Willard quickly sized up the situation and responded: “‘We also believe in the laying on of hands,’ and bounding over the fence he proceeded to do just that, much to the man’s astonishment and chagrin.”¹⁷ Willard never recorded this experience so far as preserved literature reveals, but as time passed, a strong friendship developed between the two men, and the man whom Bean had knocked out later told Rebecca the story himself.

Willard had served a mission in the southern states some 25 years earlier and was somewhat accustomed to such treatment, but Rebecca and the children had to get used to it. As the Bean children became old enough to attend school, they also ran into opposition. The parents of many of the local children initially would not allow their children to interact or play with Mormon children because of Mormonism’s poor reputation in the community. People walking down the street would cross to the other side if they saw the Beans coming toward them. In one extreme instance, as one of the Bean children bent over to pat a dog being walked by a local citizen, the dog’s owner pulled the animal away to avoid any contact with a Mormon.¹⁸ When one of the Bean children reported for school, he was escorted to a desk that had been screwed to the floor in the back corner of the room. Several students had apparently brought notes from their parents stating that they did not want their children sitting by “that Mormon boy.” For several weeks he sat by himself until the situation became more embarrassing for the teacher and the other students than it was for the Mormon boy.¹⁹

Children are resilient, but Rebecca was not used to, nor was she able to tolerate, such intense antagonism. Consequently, she had a more difficult time adjusting. Rebecca found it necessary to go to other communities to do her grocery shopping because local storekeepers and clerks refused to assist her. Further, “when Rebecca was expecting her first child, she contacted several nurses in an effort to find one willing to stay in the home and assist [her] when the baby was born.” In every case the person refused to assist her because it meant going into a Mormon home. Ultimately a neighbor woman, Ethel Hackett, who was not a trained nurse or midwife but whose brother had gone to Salt Lake City out of curiosity and decided to stay because he liked what he saw there, came to assist her. Ethel assisted a Dr. Rodenburger in the delivery of Rebecca’s first child, named Palmyra, and then stayed to assist Rebecca during her time of recuperation.²⁰ As three additional children were added to the Bean family, Dr. Rodenburger assisted in the delivery of each. All four children were born in the Joseph Smith Sr. home, and in time all were baptized in the little creek near the house, where several new converts were baptized when the Prophet Joseph lived there.

Gradually the tide of opposition began to turn. Palmyra remembered that “when there was a birthday party, everybody was invited but me.” Rebecca tried to comfort her daughter by saying, “Things will get better. Just be friendly.”²¹ And things did begin to improve as Willard met the challenge head-on.²² For over five years, while the family
coped with the community’s resentment toward them, Willard not only defended himself, his family, and the church, but he went on the offensive and stepped up the pressure on the local citizenry.

Part of Willard’s offensive against anti-Mormon sentiment was to hold street meetings for want of another place to preach the gospel and to defend his family and the church and their right to be there. He chose the main intersection of town as his forum. “Saturday night was alive with farmers migrating to the city to trade their produce for groceries and other goods,” Willard wrote. “There wasn’t much to do in the small town of Palmyra besides go to the local theater or to the ice cream parlor.”²³

To begin a street meeting, Rebecca, who was a “good soprano,”²⁴ would begin singing, and Willard, full-time missionaries, fellow church members, and friends would join in. “Willard had the voice of a bull moose and could be heard all over town when he started preaching. Invariably a large crowd gathered.”²⁵ Unfortunately, these gatherings also stopped traffic, so another place had to be found. Bean’s Quaker friend, Pliny T. Sexton, the local banker, came to his aid by allowing him to use a park, with a bandstand for a pulpit and electric lights. It is estimated that from 200 to 400 people gathered on a given weekend.

“I served notice on the ministers [and others] that we were here to stay . . . [and] that when I am attacked I [reserve] the right to defend my religion,” Willard remembered. He further told them: “I did not come here to tear down any man’s religion, or abuse those who have no religion; but rather to fit in with the better element . . . and work for the moral uplift of the community.”²⁶

Within a short time the Beans saw results. By 1925 a Sunday School had been organized, and a year later a branch was created. Stake organizations followed in 1934, 1985, and 2002.

**Acquiring Properties for the Church**

Members of the Bean family were gradually able to make friends in the community and gain added respectability for themselves and the church. These improved relations helped open the way for the church to acquire properties of significant historical interest, and Willard played an important role in this regard. He probably began exploring the possibilities of acquiring land in and around Palmyra shortly after settling there. Obtaining the Hill Cumorah became something of a personal crusade for Willard after he and members of his family attempted to take some guests up on the hill but were rudely driven away by a local farmer with a shotgun. In time Willard succeeded in obtaining for the church not only the Hill Cumorah property but other sites of significance in church history.

**Joseph Smith Sr. Farm and Sacred Grove**

When Elder George Albert Smith acquired the Joseph Smith Sr. farm in 1907, he was able to purchase a major portion of the 100-acre plot that was originally owned and farmed by the Smith family. Included in that purchase was a part of the traditional Sacred Grove. It is interesting to note that William Avery Chapman, owner of the farm before the church acquired it, “perpetuated his father’s wish that no axe be used in the grove except to remove dead timber.”²⁷ When asked why he protected the area known to Latter-day Saints as the Sacred Grove, Chapman, who was not a member of the church, responded:

Years ago my father sent for me and wished me to come at once. I found father very sick. He said, “I want to speak to you about the farm. I do not think I will live long, and the farm will go to you. I want you to take good care of the grove. I have never used an ax in the grove, except to remove dead timber. I think it should be preserved, for that is where Joseph Smith, the ‘Mormon’ Prophet, had his first vision.” Father died soon after this conversation, and I have done as he wished.²⁸

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Willard Bean preached from this bandstand in the park on Main Street in Palmyra.
During the time when Chapman was caretaker of the church-owned farm, he was careful to heed Elder Smith’s instructions (similar to that of Chapman’s father) “to take good care of the grove, to keep it cleared of underbrush, so that it would not be destroyed by fire.”

**Hill Cumorah**

The irony of the Beans’ experience of being driven off Hill Cumorah by a man with a shotgun is that the man did not own the hill and did not work for the party that did. Rather, he was protecting what he understood to be a community effort to keep Latter-day Saints out of the area. Today, visitors to the hill who enjoy the improvements that have been made there over the years may have difficulty imagining the Beans’ challenges or visualizing what the area looked like in the early decades of the 20th century or before.

The Hill Cumorah is a prominent hill that has been known through the years by several names, including “Mormon Hill.” It was singled out by the angel Moroni from many similar hills in the area when the 17-year-old prophet received a vision about the scripture treasure that was buried there. The next day, after experiencing another rehearsal of Moroni’s instructions and hearing his father’s encouragement to follow the angel’s counsel, Joseph climbed the hill to obtain his first view of the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon would be translated. Since that early day, the Hill Cumorah was owned by several different people before it was acquired by the church. The west side of the hill was owned and farmed in the early 1900s by James Inglis, and the remainder was owned by Palmyra’s banker, Pliny T. Sexton. Willard remembered: “I made a friend of James (Jim) Inglis who owned a farm straddling the highway [New York State Highway 21] the east line extending half way up the hill, taking in 24 acres of land between [the] highway and the hill. He allowed us to park on his land.”

As noted previously, Willard was also able to cultivate a friendship with Pliny Sexton. This friendship was initiated by Elder George Albert Smith, who, when he visited Palmyra, would stop to see Sexton. Elder Smith continually encouraged Willard to follow up on his earlier visits to Sexton, writing to Willard, for example, “I hope you will keep in touch with him [Pliny Sexton] and if anything develops that would afford an opportunity for us to get possession of the Hill Cumorah, do not fail to let us know at once.”

The Beans, and particularly Willard, became fast friends with Pliny. In fact, Willard and Rebecca named their first son Alvin Pliny after the Prophet’s oldest brother and Sexton. Willard and Sexton both had significant interest in the Hill Cumorah—Bean for religious reasons and Sexton for business reasons, seeing the hill largely as investment property. Willard worked closely with Inglis and Sexton over several years to find an opportunity to purchase the hill.

Inglis and Willard visited each other periodically. Without expressing his interest in purchasing the Cumorah property, Willard asked about the value of the Inglis farm. On one of those occasions, Inglis confided that he was considering retiring from farming. “He offered to sell his farm to us,” Willard recalled. “I knew we would some time need it for our purposes, yet [I] did not appear over anxious but asked him what he considered the farm of 97 acres was worth.” In addition to the 97 acres, the farmland included, “1½ acres of old orchard, five acres of new orchard in full bearing, [one] span of horses, three cows, [and] full farm equipment.” Inglis even “knocked a few hundred dollars off for repairs that were needed on the buildings.”

An early view of the Hill Cumorah.
Willard reported his activities to the First Presidency, he was “ordered to buy it.”³⁴ The deal was closed on 17 September 1923.

The part of the hill that was owned by Sexton took far longer to obtain. Sexton owned, it was estimated, over 100 pieces of property. He knew of the church’s interest in the hill and tried on several occasions to sell the property to Elder George Albert Smith, Willard Bean, and other church representatives. He had, however, apparently also heard some exaggerated stories about the rumored wealth of the church, and the price he wanted for the hill for was far more than the church was willing to pay. When Sexton died on 5 September 1924,³⁵ his vast estate went into possession of 105 heirs; a niece was the nearest of kin.³⁶ They were all very antagonistic toward the church and made a pact that they would never sell the property to the church at any price.

The estate’s legal counsel, attorney C. C. Congdon, was more friendly toward the church and especially to Willard Bean. Willard had cultivated a friendship with him over several years of personal association. Willard reported in 1928 that after several years of waiting, and after the most bitter opponents had died, Congdon indicated to him that several of the heirs wanted to get their share of the inheritance settlement from the estate and “that he [Congdon] had talked the matter over with the judge who said that if the deal [to sell Sexton’s previous holdings] could be put over quietly, without publicity, to block [it] before it could be closed, it would be legal. Attorney Congdon knew, and I knew, that the majority of the heirs were anxious to get their bit [part] out of the will and would be glad to [settle for less].”³⁷

The deal unfolded in a remarkable manner. After finishing initial negotiations, Bean wrote a letter to the First Presidency detailing the specifics and suggested, “If you think the opportune time has arrived for us to acquire possession of the Cumorah Hill property, consider the enclosed proposition and let me know by telegram.”³⁸ Two days later he received a telegram from the First Presidency: “Terms satisfactory—close deal!”³⁹ Three days after that,

Properties surrounding the Hill Cumorah. Based on a sketch from about 1935. Courtesy of Church Archives.
Bean received a letter from the First Presidency that had been sent before the telegram was sent. It said in part: "Dear Brother Bean: Please see lawyer of Sexton estate and get definite offer in writing if you can possibly do so, for the hill farm of 170 acres. If they will not sell it alone, get definite offer on the other pieces of property with the Hill."  

A few weeks later, the church purchased Sexton’s 170-acre farm at the Hill Cumorah and also acquired in the deal another farm, one of 220 acres, known as the Bennett farm; a third, smaller farm of lesser value; and a large two-story brick building in Palmyra with a basement, known as the Grange Hall.

Remarkably, both the First Presidency in Salt Lake City and Willard Bean in Palmyra had been thinking the same thing at the same time. Both groups had acted on their feelings, and by the time the instructions from the First Presidency arrived, Willard had already complied with them in every detail. In a later communication, the First Presidency also noted the coincidence: “We have read your letter with a great deal of interest. We were very glad to learn that you secured an option on the Hill Cumorah Farm and other property before receiving word from us to do so. We had already noticed the singular coincidence of your writing to us the very same day and possibly the same hour that we were writing you... Signed First Presidency.”

In the April 1928 general conference of the church, President Heber J. Grant reported that “the Church has purchased the Hill Cumorah. The purchase embraces the farm where the hill stands, and the adjoining farm, which together with one that we had already purchased, including a part of the hill, gives us now the entire possession of the Hill Cumorah.”

While living at the Joseph Smith Sr. farm, Willard also assisted in the purchase of the Martin Harris farm (north of Palmyra) and the Peter Whitmer farm, where much of the translation of the Book of Mormon was undertaken (about 30 miles southeast of Palmyra, near Fayette, New York).

**Hill Cumorah Beautification and Monument**

After the Prophet Joseph retrieved the plates from the Hill Cumorah, neighbors, antagonists, treasure seekers, and others severely scarred the hill by digging holes (presumably looking for treasure), cutting timber, and otherwise changing the complexion of Cumorah. Soon after acquiring the entire Hill Cumorah property, Willard determined, “with the approbation of Church leaders,” to return the hill to as much of its original appearance as possible. The original aspect of his plan included reforesting the hill, providing water for the new plants, illuminating the hill at night, and building a road to the top.

The reforestation project that Willard undertook was immense. “Soon after acquiring the Hill

On Sunday, 23 September 1923, people gathered at the Hill Cumorah to celebrate the centennial of the angel Moroni’s visit to Joseph Smith on the evening of 21 September 1823.
Cumorah [for the church], I began to bring it back to its original self by setting out evergreen and hardwood trees, ten or twelve thousand each year."⁴⁴ Over a period of several years, Willard and his sons, together with his brother Virginius,⁴⁵ hired men, missionaries, and volunteers, planted nearly 70,000 trees.

Many of the tree seedlings that these men and other volunteers planted on the hill were donated. Willard recorded: "I contacted the State Conservation Department at Albany, [sent] them a picture of the hill with historical data, and drew their attention to a fine clay model of 'Mormon Hill' in the Education Building across from the State Capitol. They sent me an official list of available trees, with instructions on planting, and said they would be pleased to furnish me all the trees I wanted. The only charge would be for transportation."⁴⁶

Other seedlings, particularly the young hardwood trees that are indigenous to the area, were transplanted from the Smith farm. Willard and his sons, in an effort to keep the Sacred Grove clean, free from fire danger, and aesthetically pleasing, annually thinned out new growth and planted approximately 3,000 hardwood trees on the Hill Cumorah. Willard could think of no better place to plant those trees.

Willard also helped build a road up the hill with a 6 percent grade “so people [could] go up to the top without changing gear. The road comes out on the crest of the hill, well back where there is considerable parking space.”⁴⁷ This road later proved important for work crews when a monument was erected atop the hill in 1935 to commemorate the visit of the angel Moroni to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1823. Willard recalled that when he first suggested to the general church leaders that a monument be built there, “they hesitated and questioned the [project’s] advisability, fearing that it might be desecrated and marred by souvenir hunters. After convincing them that the [local] people would be proud of it and treat it as their very own,” Willard promised “the complete cooperation of the better element of the community.”⁴⁸

Of his own volition, he laid the groundwork for erecting the monument. Finally, on 21 July 1935 President Heber J. Grant, several members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and other guests, including missionaries and a crowd estimated at over 3,000, witnessed the dedication of the monument. A missionary returning from Great Britain witnessed the event and recorded the following:

On a beautiful summer morning a great crowd gathered at the hill. They had come from [throughout] the nation, and included a number of the General Authorities of the Church. This writer, on his way home from a mission in England, was among that crowd.

On the summit of the hill was a canvas-draped monument. At an appointed signal four trumpeters raised their gleaming instruments. In sharp clear tones, “an angel from on high” echoed across the placid countryside. . . . Then the canvas shroud fell from the monument, and the figure of Moroni looked
out across the quiet fields... To a returning missionary the picture of that summer day is unforgettable.⁴⁹

The returning missionary was Gordon B. Hinckley, who knew Willard Bean personally and wrote of his contributions.⁵⁰ Few could have guessed then the impact that Elder Hinckley would later have on this area so significant in the life of the Willard Bean family, nor would many recognize that the monument was the culmination of 20 years of work and a symbol of what Willard had been sent to New York to accomplish.

Later, under Willard’s supervision, additional improvements to the Hill Cumorah included a water system, electricity, and a bureau of information. Further, Willard planted “a privet hedge high along the west side near the top spelling out C U M O R A H with letters 20 x 35 feet.”⁵¹ This hedge replaced a sign erected by Willard to draw the attention of motorists to the hill and to assist in his ongoing missionary efforts.

The predecessor of the Hill Cumorah Pageant was a theatrical production written by Norma Fairbanks and initially staged under the direction of Willard Bean in 1926. The site was near the Sacred Grove. Later this pageant was staged on a prominence called Echo Hill, northeast of the Joseph Smith Sr. home but still on the original Smith farm. “After organizing [Latter-day Saint] branches at Palmyra, Rochester, and Canandaigua,” Willard recorded, “we began to hold picnics and hot dog roasts, followed by programs in front of the Sacred Grove. We then put on small pageants in the field east of the grove, then on Echo Hill east of the Joseph Smith home. The idea grew and after we got possession of the Hill [Cumorah] we held them there.”⁵²

In 1937 the pageant, now named “America’s Witness for Christ,” was moved to the Hill Cumorah, where it has remained ever since. Echo Hill later became the site of another significant development. In 1999 President Gordon B. Hinckley announced that a temple would be built in Palmyra, and the site selected was on Echo Hill. The Palmyra Temple is the 100th temple to be announced and the 77th dedicated in this dispensation. It was dedicated by President Hinckley on 6 April 2000.

Continuing Impact

With several important pieces of property now owned by the church and with the historical interest shown by thousands of church members in the area, the First Presidency determined to call other families, like the Beans, to farm the land and to be caretakers of the properties. These families also learned the historical significance of the area and thereafter became caretakers and tour guides to care for the church’s interests, answer questions, and teach the gospel to interested visitors.

Two of these early caretakers were Lewis Jackson Stoner and his wife, Elizabeth. They and their
two children enjoyed frequent association with the Bean family. As employees of Willard Bean, they labored with him on the Joseph Smith Sr. farm and proved to be dependable workers. During their stay there, they were taught the restoration of the gospel, at least a working knowledge of church history, and the significance of the Smith farm within that history. When the Stoner family finished their assignment at the Smith farm, it was to accept a new assignment (again as employees of the church) to live at and supervise the Peter Whitmer farm in Fayette, New York.

The Stoners’ only son, Harold Jay Stoner, joined the church as a result of the teachings and example of Willard Bean and his family and through the years remained faithful.⁵³ In March 1970 at age 60, Harold was called to serve as patriarch in the Rochester New York Stake. He is but one of several people who converted to the church after having first heard the gospel taught by the Willard Bean family.

Through the years, numerous prominent people, church leaders, and other guests visited the area. Willard often left his farm work to tell visitors about the significance of the sites or to take them to other places of historic interest. If he was not available, his wife and children showed them around and rehearsed the story of the restoration.

Alvin, the Beans’ son, remembered that occasionally a grateful guest would try to pay him for his time and commentary. Money was scarce, especially to a young boy on the farm, but he would reluctantly refuse the reward offered him. On one occasion, Alvin asked his father’s counsel on the matter. His father responded, “Son, you are right to refuse, but don’t hold your hand out when you do.”⁵⁴

Aftermath

The Beans were released from their assignment in the spring of 1939. It had been 24 years since Willard and Rebecca had departed Richfield, Utah.⁵⁵ The older sons had left home to attend Utah State University. The younger children remained at home to continue their schooling.

One day in the early spring of 1939, the Merlin Ellis family arrived in Palmyra and, like so many other visitors, went to the Smith farm and knocked on the door. Unlike other visitors, Merlin and Echo Ellis and their six children were called to replace the Bean family as residents at the Joseph Smith Sr. farm. The Ellises arrived expecting to move their family into the farm home.⁵⁶ Inexplicably, the Beans’ apparently had no prior notice of their impending release until the Ellis family showed up at their door.⁵⁷ One of the Ellises’ sons, Glenn, reported of this experience that “the Beans had not been given much notice about the change, but they moved over and took in our large family, as they had accommodated so many people over the last twenty-four years. We lived there for three weeks with the Beans, a priceless opportunity for us to hear all about the historical spots which surrounded us.”⁵⁸

Left to right: Preparations for the 1935 dedication; Willard Bean instructing missionaries on Hill Cumorah; President Heber J. Grant (left) and Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley at Cumorah.
As word spread about the Beans’ imminent release and departure from Palmyra, many local residents wished to pay tribute to them for their years of service and friendship. During the three weeks that the Bean and Ellis families shared the Joseph Smith home, the Beans, who were busy trying to pack their possessions, were often invited to dinners, receptions, and parties. “We had the satisfaction of seeing the prejudice gradually melt away, and respect for Joseph Smith and the Mormon people thoroughly established in Cumorah Land,” Willard wrote. “We had become fixtures. We learned the language and ways of the natives of Palmyra and the surrounding country and they had learned us.”

One of Rebecca Bean’s vivid recollections shows the contrast in local perceptions of the church between the time of her family’s arrival in Palmyra and their departure. One evening three men came to the Bean home and were invited in. The men refused to enter the home, but one of them replied: “We are a committee that has been sent out to tell you people we don’t want you here; we don’t want any Mormons here; we want you to get out.” Brother Bean maintained his composure and said, “Well now we are sorry to hear that; we had hoped to come out here and fit in with you people and be an asset to the community. [But] I am telling you we are here to stay if we have to fight our way. I will take you on one at a time or two at a time; it won’t make any difference.”

One writer described the tensions thus: “To say they [the Beans] were unwelcome would be a gross understatement. The venom fairly seeped from their beings [referring to the local citizenry, clergy, and opponents of the Bean family and the church they represented]. Mormons hadn’t lived in Palmyra for 84 years.”

“We had the satisfaction of seeing the prejudice gradually melt away, and respect for Joseph Smith and the Mormon people thoroughly established in Cumorah Land,” Willard wrote. “We had become fixtures. We learned the language and ways of the natives of Palmyra and the surrounding country and they had learned us.”

Contrast, at the time of the Beans’ departure nearly 24 years later, one New York friend said to Willard, “We want you to know that the news that you are soon to leave us came as a shock, and we think the Mormon Church is making a big mistake in taking you away from here.”

The Beans were feted by the three closest branches of the church, none of which was in existence when they arrived. Willard was honored for his involvement in the Lion’s Club, the PTA, and the Businessman’s Club, all of Palmyra, as well as for his service in the Rochester Chamber of Commerce and as a councilman for the Boy Scouts of America for all of Wayne County.

Having completed their assignment to make friends for the church in Palmyra and to build up the church there, the Beans moved to Salt Lake City, where they were assigned to continue their missionary duties at Temple Square. Several months later, Willard suffered a debilitating stroke, but he learned to walk again with the aid of a crutch and a cane—and characteristically continued his missionary service at the bureau of information. He passed away on 25 Sep-
tember 1949 at the age of 81. Rebecca paid the following tribute to her husband: “He was a student of the Gospel all his life and could quote any scripture asked for. He was a missionary all his life whether at home or away, and he had a rich, full life. . . . His work and his life will never die. He was a great man!”\(^\text{64}\)

Rebecca had, of course, been active in missionary work with her husband. After his death she continued her labors for a time and returned to Palmyra on at least one occasion. She lived in Salt Lake City and remained alone for nearly 27 years before passing away in Orem, Utah, on 25 June 1976. She noted shortly before her death, “My days and nights in the sunset of my life are sweet and peaceful, and filled with golden memories. I have such love for all the missionaries I have known. I was ‘Mom’ to thousands of missionaries and could never live long enough to thank my Father-in-Heaven for all the blessings that I have had in my life and that are mine today.”\(^\text{65}\)

Willard Bean was the first Latter-day Saint known to have returned to live in upstate New York since the departure of church members from there in the early 1830s. He moved into the Smith home, established himself as a farmer, and provided for his family by tilling the same ground in much the same way as the Smiths had done nearly a century before. The Beans’ mission was originally to have lasted “five years or more,”\(^\text{66}\) but as it turned out, it stretched into many years. Willard and Rebecca arrived as newlyweds and left a quarter of a century later as grandparents. One purpose of their mission to Palmyra was to lay a foundation of goodwill that would help reverse the prevailing prejudice there against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Evidence of their success continues to the present day as seen by the friendly reception of tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints who annually visit church history sites in the area. \(\text{\textcopyright}\)
Encounters with Cumorah
A Selective, Personal Bibliography
THE HILL CUMORAH is probably mentioned in every book ever written about Joseph Smith or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Any narrative concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon must make at least passing reference to the circumstances of recovering the gold plates. However, finding accounts that go beyond simply reporting the basic facts can be a challenge. In many well-known works, regardless of whether the author is a faithful Latter-day Saint or not, the events that took place on and around the hill are reviewed by doing little more than paraphrasing Joseph’s straightforward narrative.¹

My intent in this discursive bibliography is to identify accounts of the Hill Cumorah that go beyond Joseph’s basic account. Some are firsthand descriptions of the hill’s appearance at the time when the sacred events took place. Others focus more on the emotional or spiritual aspect of the hill, while still others are poetic or nostalgic. They range in date from the 1830s to the beginning of the 21st century and come from a wide spectrum of observers with diverse backgrounds and intents. Each account is informative, uplifting, or intriguing in its own way, and taken together they enrich our understanding and appreciation of this remarkable place and the role it played in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.²

What we today universally refer to as the Hill Cumorah was apparently unnamed when the Smith family moved to upstate New York in 1816. Local farmers recognized it as one of the largest of the dozens of similar prominences in the area but otherwise paid it little heed. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had been introduced to Cumorah as a place-name in late May or early June 1829 while translating the Book of Mormon (see accompanying sidebar), yet it apparently did not become part of common usage, even among Latter-day Saints, until many years later. Throughout the 1830s and ’40s, the mount, if named at all, was called “Mormon Hill,” “Bible Hill,” or “Golden Bible Hill.”

Much was written about the new Mormon religious movement in newspapers throughout the young United States in the 1830s. One influential account appeared first in a New York paper in the fall of 1831 and was subsequently reprinted or paraphrased in various forms in at least a dozen other publications over the next few months. This was a two-part report by James Gordon Bennett about “one of the strangest pieces of fanaticism to which the ill-advised and the worst regulated ambition and folly of certain portions of the clergy of Western New York ever gave birth.”³

Bennett’s “brief view of the rise and progress of the Mormon Religion,” based on notes taken during a short visit to the Palmyra area in August
Early Encounter with the Name Cumorah?

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery probably first encountered the name Cumorah in late May or early June 1829 during the process of translating the plates of the Book of Mormon (see Mormon 6:2–11; 8:2). How and when did this name subsequently come to be applied to the hill near Palmyra where the plates were recovered? Although existing historical data cannot answer this question definitively, an account by David Whitmer provides an interesting clue.

David related an event that happened in “late June” 1829, shortly after he was privileged to be one of the three special witnesses to the Book of Mormon. He was asked to go to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to pick up Joseph and Oliver and transport them back to his father’s house in Fayette. He related:

When I was returning to Fayette with Joseph and Oliver all of us riding in the wagon, Oliver and I on an old-fashioned wooden spring seat and Joseph behind us, while traveling along in a clear open place, a very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon who saluted us with, “good morning, it is very warm,” at the same time wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation, and by a sign from Joseph I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said very pleasantly, “No, I am going to Cumorah.” This name was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant. We all gazed at him and at each other, and as I looked round enquiringly of Joseph the old man instantly disappeared, so that I did not see him again.

David described the gentleman as being “about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches tall and heavy set . . . dressed in a suit of brown woolen clothes, his hair and beard were white.” He then added, “I also remember that he had on his back a sort of knapsack with something in, shaped like a book. It was the messenger who had the plates, who had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony.”

David related his story during an interview with Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith in Richmond, Missouri, in early September 1878. It was recorded in Smith’s journal and included in a lengthy letter from New York City dated 17 September 1878. The letter was published as “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith” in the Deseret Evening News, 16 November 1878, and in the Deseret News, 27 November 1878. The portion quoted above is found on page 677.

Unfortunately, the accuracy of David’s story is uncertain. For one thing, this recollection came 49 years later, when he was in his seventies. Moreover, it is not corroborated by any other early account. For example, neither Oliver Cowdery’s 1835 description of the hill nor Joseph Smith’s 1838 history of the church refers to the site by the name Cumorah (see Joseph Smith—History 1:51). For these reasons, some scholars do not accept the account as historically reliable.

1831, includes several errors and provides much misinformation, such as identifying Sidney Rigdon as “Henry Rangdon or Ringdon” and reporting that the gold plates were found in an iron chest. It also exhibits (and certainly helped disseminate) the attitudes of mistrust and suspicion that haunted the church for years to come. Yet it also offers a fine description of Cumorah as it appeared 170 years ago:

About the same time that this person [Sidney Rigdon] appeared among them, a splendid excavation was begun in a long narrow hill, between Manchester and Palmyra. This hill has since been called by some, the Golden Bible Hill. The road from Canandaigua to Palmyra, runs along its western base. At the northern extremity the hill is quite abrupt and narrow. It runs to the south for a half mile and then spreads out into a piece of broad table land, covered with beautiful orchards and wheat fields. On the east, the Canandaigua outlet runs past it on its way to the beautiful village of Vienna in Phelps. It is profusely covered to the top with Beech, Maple, Bass, and White-wood—the northern extremity is quite bare of trees.4

After this benign paragraph, Bennett embarks on a lengthy tirade against “a most powerful and ambitious religious party of zealots, and their dupes” that had long plagued western New York State and that had sown the seeds of Mormonism, a religion “run into madness by zealots and hypocrites.” He then describes how the plates were found and what happened to them:

It was during this state of public feeling in which the money diggers of Ontario county, by the suggestions of the Ex-Preacher from Ohio [Sidney Rigdon], thought of turning their digging concern into a religious plot, and thereby have a better chance of working upon the credulity and ignorance of the[i]r associates and the neighborhood. Money and a good living might be got in this way. It was given out that visions had appeared to Joe Smith—that a set of golden plates on which was engraved the “Book of Mormon,” enclosed in an iron chest, was deposited somewhere in the hill I have mentioned. People laughed at the first intimation of the story, but the Smiths and Rangdon persisted in its truth. . . . They treated their own invention with the utmost religious respect. By the spe-
cial interposition of God, the golden plates, on which was engraved the Book of Mormon, and other works, had been buried for ages in the hill by a wandering tribe of the children of Israel, who had found their way to western New York, before the birth of [C]hristianity itself. . . .

In relation to the finding of the plates and the taking the engraving, a number of ridiculous stories are told.—Some unsanctified fellow looked out the other side of the hill. They had to follow it with humility and found it embedded beneath a beautiful grove of maples. Smith’s wife, who had a little of the curiosity of her sex, peeped into the large chest in which he kept the engravings taken from the golden plates, and straightway one half the new Bible vanished, and has not been recovered to this day.⁵

After such descriptions it is encouraging to read a more sympathetic commentary on the Hill Cumorah and its role in early church history. In 1835 Oliver Cowdery penned a series of lengthy letters titled “The Rise of the Church” that appeared in the Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate and were later reprinted in Times and Seasons and in pamphlet form.⁶ In Letters VII and VIII he describes his visit to Cumorah in 1830:

You are acquainted with the mail road from Palmyra, Wayne Co. to Canandaigua, Ontario Co. N.Y. and also, as you pass from the former to the latter place, before arriving at the little village of Manchester, say from three to four, or about four miles from Palmyra, you pass a large hill on the east side of the road. Why I say large, is, because it is as large perhaps, as any in that country. To a person acquainted with this road, a description would be unnecessary, as it is the largest and rises the highest of any on that route. The north end rises quite sudden until it assumes a level with the more southerly extremity, and I think I may say an elevation higher than at the south a short distance, say half or three fourths of a mile. As you pass toward Canandaigua it lessens gradually until the surface assumes its common level, or is broken by other smaller hills or ridges, water courses and ravines. I think I am justified in saying that this is the highest hill for some distance round. . . .

At about one mile west rises another ridge of less height, running parallel with the former, leaving a beautiful vale between. The soil is of the first quality for the country, and under a state of cultivation, which gives a prospect at once imposing, when one reflects on the fact, that here, between these hills, the entire power and national strength of both the Jaredites and Nephites were destroyed.⁷

Oliver Cowdery visited the Hill Cumorah in 1830 and later penned detailed descriptions of it. Courtesy of the Community of Christ.

Oliver devotes the remainder of this letter to reviewing the final battles that he believed took place in that valley, a place where “once sunk to nought the pride and strength of two mighty nations” and where “lie commingled, in one mass of ruin, the ashes of thousands . . . blood mixed with blood, flesh with flesh, bones with bones, and dust with dust!”⁸ He continues the narrative in his next letter:

The hill of which I have been speaking, at the time mentioned, presented a varied appearance: the north end rose suddenly from the plain, forming a promontory without timber, but
covered with grass. As you passed to the south 
you soon came to scattering timber, the surface 
having been cleared by art or by wind; and a 
short distance further left, you are surrounded 
with the common forest of the country. It is 
necessary to observe, that even the part cleared 
was only occupied for pasturage, its steep ascent 
and narrow summit not admitting the plow 
of the husbandman, with any degree of ease 
or profit. It was at the second mentioned place 
where the record was found to be deposited, on 
the west side of the hill, not far from the top 
down its side; and when myself visited the place 
in the year 1830, there were several trees stand-
ing: enough to cause a shade in summer, but not 
so much as to prevent the surface being covered 
with grass—which was also the case when the 
record was first found.²

He describes with similar enthusiasm and symp-
pathy the manner in which the plates were deposited 
and the events of their unearthing by Joseph Smith.

While Oliver admitted that he occasionally “in-
dulged too freely in reflections”¹⁰ and lost himself 
in poetic rhapsody, his writings hold but a faint 
candle to the extravagant prose of Orson Pratt. In 
1866 Pratt expressed his feelings for this “hill of an-
cient Seers and Prophets” in an article in the Millen-
-nial Star.¹¹ Three excerpts capture well his passion 
for the sacred place:

And all the ancient plates, Mormon deposited in 
Cumorah, about three hundred and eighty-four 
years after Christ. When Moroni, about thirty-
six years after, made the deposit of the book en-
trusted to him, he was, without doubt, inspired 
to select a department of the hill separate from 
the great sacred depository of the numerous vol-
umes hid up by his father. The particular place 
in the hill, where Moroni secreted the book, was 
revealed, by the angel, to the Prophet Joseph 
Smith, to whom the volume was delivered in 
September, A.D. 1827. But the grand repository 
of all the numerous records of the ancient na-
tions of the western continent, was located in 
another department of the hill, and its contents 
under the charge of holy angels, until the day 
should come for them to be transferred to the 
sacred temple of Zion.¹²

There is no spot on this wide world of ours, 
which is calculated to excite more vivid reflec-
tions, than the wonderful hill of Cumorah. There 
the history of one-half of our globe, reposed, 
for fourteen centuries, in profound unbroken 
silence: there, “the everlasting Gospel,” engraved, 
not on tablets of stone, but on plates of gold, 
awaited the voice of the heavenly angel to reveal 
the priceless treasure: there, buried in the holy 
archives of Cumorah’s sacred hill, are plates of 
brass, plates of gold, undimmed by time; sacredly 
guarded as the temple of heaven: there shines 
the Urim and Thummim, the stones of light, 
the gems of immortality: there, reposes in words 
of light, the hidden knowledge of ages past, the 
prophetic history of ages to come: there wisdom 
has selected her palace, and understanding her 
dwelling place, until “the spirit is poured out 
from on high,” and “the skies pour down righ-

At last the time came for Joseph Smith to retrieve the gold plates. 
The Hours Before the Sunrise, by Lois Kerr. Oil on canvas.
teousness;” then, “the earth opens and brings forth salvation.”

All the wealth of ages is valueless, compared with the records of eternal wisdom, the inexhaustible fountain of understanding, hidden in the secret recesses of the wonderful—the beautiful—the lovely hill Cumorah! O, Cumorah! the hill of ancient Seers and Prophets! the hill of God! Sanctified by holy angels’ feet! From thy bowels is heard a voice, low, sweet, mild, of heavenly tones! yet it thrills through every fibre of the heart! It speaks of man—of God—of earth—of heaven—of hell! It speaks of the past—of the future—of the destiny of nations—the reign of Messiah—the resurrection—the final judgment! O holy, lovely mount! the sacred resting place of Zion’s law! In thy chambers dwell eternal riches! In thy lovely bosom are fountains that never dry! Speak! O speak again! Let Zion hear thy voice! for thy voice is not the voice of feeble helpless man! but the voice of the Eternal One, speaking from the ground.

During the latter half of the 19th century, many Latter-day Saints traveled eastward to visit important church history sites. One such group consisted of Andrew Jenson, Edward Stevenson, and Joseph S. Black. They penned a series of letters that were published in the Deseret News in September and October 1888 and later republished in a pamphlet that was used by later travelers as a guidebook to the sites. The elders felt a special reverence for the Hill Cumorah as they contemplated the great battles that they believed had taken place there many generations in the past, as well as the glorious events of the century in which they were living:

Sitting on this holy and historical ground the scene of some of the greatest events which have ever transpired in the history of men upon the earth—it is but natural that our minds should be deeply impressed, and that we should give way to unusual and solemn meditation; for it was here, more than twenty-four centuries ago, that the descendants of Jared and his brother fought their last exterminating battle. . . .

It was also in this land that Mormon in his old age and his son Moroni led their Nephite armies against their brethren the Lamanites—the last time—to that dreadful massacre that forever swept a once of God highly favored race out of existence as a nation. . . . Moroni and a few others were the only ones who escaped with their lives from that terrible battlefield. This took place more than fourteen hundred years ago, but looking over this hilly country to-day—the topographical or general character of which has perhaps not changed very much since that time—our imagination can easily conceive how the exile Moroni, the custodian of the records of his fathers, was hunted by the blood-thirsty Lamanites while writing the closing paragraphs of the Nephite history, and how he finally, no doubt in the shades of night, emerged from his hiding place, and deposited the sacred treasure in this hill, where it lay 1,407 years.

We pass over that long and dreary night and again conceive of Moroni as an angel of glory, still in charge of the same records, instructing the humble farmer’s boy, and preparing his mind for a great and noble work, in which tens of thousands were to rejoice. Yonder stands the house still in which that ancient Prophet of God first called upon the youth, who afterwards became the translator of the Book of Mormon, and the next day showed him the plates on the very spot where we now stand. And fifty-nine years and six days ago to-day Joseph Smith received the records of the Nephites from the hands of Moroni. O, how sublime the thought!
What emotions fill our hearts when we think of it! We feel that we, indeed, stand on holy ground, and, as if by instinct, we silently renew our covenants that we will be faithful and true in keeping the commandments of God.¹⁶

Their physical description of the hill differs little from what had been given by previous visitors, but it does add a few details of how the hill’s appearance had changed.

It rises abruptly from the more level country north of it to the height of about 150 feet. Climbing it from the north end, the highest point, on which stands the stump of a large tree, is soon reached; south of this the hill gradually recedes until it is lost in the level about one mile distant. There is a number of other hills in this part of the country, and they all extend north and south like so many summits or ridges. A number of them are several miles long, but only a few hundred yards across from east to west. The hill Cumorah is no exception from this rule. Besides the north end its eastern and western slopes are quite steep, and the top consists of a narrow ridge somewhat rocky. Both sides of the north end of the hill have been plowed by the present owner clear to the top, and only a very few trees have been suffered to remain. About 200 yards south from the north end of the hill on the west side, however, is a beautiful beech grove containing, we should judge, about six acres of land; most of the trees are small, but stand very close together. Into the shade of this little grove we retired in solemn prayer and rejoiced exceedingly in being permitted to be here.¹⁷

At the same time that these men were visiting Cumorah, George Q. Cannon was working on a biography of Joseph Smith, whom he had personally known and loved.¹⁸ He reworked his tale into a shorter version for children in 1900. The information is essentially the same, but the children’s adaptation has a delightful charm of its own, as evidenced by the telling of events that happened in
1823. President Cannon describes Joseph’s night-long interview with Moroni, his resulting weakness when he tried to work with his father in the fields the next morning, and his fourth heavenly vision. He then tells his young readers how Joseph’s father reacted to his son’s tale and what happened to Joseph as the day went on:

The father was probably much surprised to hear of the angel’s visits and of his message. He had little dreamed that at the surface of the high hill within his sight were hidden sacred objects of priceless value, that among them were writings which the wisest men could but imperfectly understand, and that his unlearned son should be the guardian of these and by the power of God was to bring forth a perfect translation of them. But the father knew his boy and believed him. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit rested upon him and he told Joseph that the vision was of God and that he should go and do as the angel had commanded him.

Joseph’s strength returned somewhat and he set out for the hill to find the sacred record. The distance was only two and a half miles, so that the walk was not very long, but on the way he was sorely tempted to take the plates and use them for himself. The promptings of the Holy Spirit were still with him, however, and he overcame this evil thought.

On the west side of the hill, near the summit, he found the rounded top of a stone above the ground, and when he dug away the earth he saw that it was the cover of the box. This stone was somewhat in the shape of a shield with the outside upward, and when the earth covered the edges it looked like the top of an ordinary boulder. Joseph had seen this exact spot in his vision and did not doubt that he would find the plates below, but his heart beat fast when he put his lever under and began to pry up the cover. He raised it without great difficulty and worked it off, and then within his reach he beheld the hidden treasure of gold.

Perhaps this boy had never read of the wondrous caves of Aladdin and Ali Baba, or of the secret treasures of Monte Cristo Island, but every boy has dreams of treasure-trove and of becoming rich and powerful. Whether Joseph was dazzled by the rich prize before him and for the moment thought this was just a dream come true, or whether he merely wished to examine these beautiful, strange things, we do not know, but he reached forth to draw them out. Immediately their guardian appeared and prevented him. The angel told him the time had not yet come for him to receive them. . . .

Moroni told Joseph that he had hidden up the records four centuries after the birth of Jesus, while he was living on the earth. He said that the Nephites, the people to whom he belonged, called the hill where they stood Cumorah, and that a still earlier people, the Jaredites, called it Ramah. This was a very important hill in the history of both these peoples.

Joseph learned many other things that were new to him, and how strange he must have felt when he realized that he was the only person on earth to know them! . . .

When the vision was ended Joseph replaced the stone, covered it as before and returned home. That night when he retired to bed, he thanked the Lord for what He had taught him, and prayed humbly that he might keep himself pure and faithful. During the last twenty-four hours he had been visited five times by an angel of light, he had seen a great golden book, the history of the peoples that had passed away, and with the book, the holy seerstone and the breast-plate of gold. Besides all this his life-work had been shown him, and he now knew something of what he must suffer and what he must do.¹⁹

In the same year that this children’s book was published (1900), Susa Young Gates made a short trip to the Palmyra area, including visits to the Whitmer and Smith farms and to the Hill Cumorah. She and Elder Claude Taylor, a friend who lived in a nearby city, took pleasure in hearing the kind words spoken by an elderly gentleman who had known the Whitmers, felt the stinging rebuff of the man who owned the farm that encompassed the Hill Cumorah, and enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the family that lived in the old Smith home. Their greatest thrill, however, came from their two short visits to the hill. She reported her experiences in an article in the Young Woman’s Journal in January 1901.²⁰

Gates describes the country as consisting of “undulating, rolling hills; none of them high, or very precipitous; but all covered either with grain
fields or sightly forests of trees.” After learning that Cumorah was still some three or four miles away, and feeling that this “was too much of walk for a woman,” they hired a carriage to take them farther.

They had read Oliver Cowdery’s description of the area, and as they “drove slowly over the excel-
lent country road,” they wondered “where [their] own particular point of interest lay.”

We were watching for the highest hill in the neighborhood, but forgot we were approaching it from the south side.

“Where is the Hill?” we asked our driver. “There it is,” he said, pointing to a low hill gradually rising at its summit to the northward. It was only one of many hills; not a series of foot hills tied or held together with slight elevations, but rising, most of them from the plain, in varied and graceful lines.

We looked eagerly about the country, and fancy went out to the two terrible conflicts that took place in this neighborhood.

The sun was hanging low in the west, and we were anxious to reach a friendly shelter for the night.

Our driver stopped at a farm house on the western side of the Hill but we soon found there was no chance of lodgings there.

The drive around the north end of the Hill repaid us for coming; the mighty sentinel rises with a strength and majesty when you face him which impresses you with all the dignity and force of which an inanimate custodian is capable.

What a rush of emotions filled my heart!

After an unpleasant visit with the farmer who owned the surrounding land, and as the day was drawing to a close, they walked over “rough plowed ground, covered with stubble,” to the hill.

The extreme northern part is not under cul-
tivation, nor is the upper western slope, except for the grove of small trees and the wild grasses which cover the brown soil. But the whole of the eastern and southern sides is planted out to corn; and along the very summit, which is quite narrow—at the north stood great shocks of corn, looking like stacked guns in the red sunset.

When we reached the top, we turned and looked to the northward at the rich landscape spread out before us; hills, forests, farms, homes, and villages, gave delightful change to the prospect... In the east the great silver moon was just rising above a distant hill top; in the west, the red sun was dipping behind a forest-crowned hill.

We hurried down again, filled with the beauty of our surroundings.

The next day, which was Sunday, they once more ascended to the top of the hill.

[A]fter locating, somewhat to our own satisfaction, the place where we thought the sacred box once rested, we walked on to the small grove of young timber.

Here we seated ourselves on a fallen log, took out our hymn book, and Book of Mormon, and held a quiet informal service, suited to the time and place.
What our thoughts and hopes were as we lingered on the sacred spot, where so much of the history of this continent had its center and focus, only those who have been there could understand and appreciate.

Once more we climbed to the northern summit, and filled eye and memory with the beautiful scene before us.

Then we returned by the quiet drive to Palmyra.²⁴

Another church member who visited the Hill Cumorah about this same time was George E. Anderson. What set him apart from other travelers was his camera. He was a professional photographer whose dream was to compile a pictorial record of the rise of the church. In April 1907 he left Utah to begin a mission in England, taking several months on his way east to photograph dozens of important church history sites. Among the hundreds of photographs he made were several of the area in and around Palmyra, New York.

Although some of Anderson’s images were published, they remained largely unknown to the general public.²⁵ Not until 1995 did they receive greater attention when 153 of them, along with a transcription of the diary he kept throughout most of his journey, were published as Church History in Black and White: George Edward Anderson’s Photographic Mission to Latter-day Saint Historical Sites, 1907 Diary, 1907–8 Photographs.²⁶

Anderson’s journal entry for 14 August 1907 mentions his visit to “Mormon Hill”:

Rose before sunup, and by the time the rays lit up the landscape, I had my camera from the other side of the hill (where I left it last night) and ready to make pictures. Made several negatives from different points. . . .

One or two more negatives of the hill and visited the top and Mr. Clemon’s boy took me to the place where it [is] said the plates were found—the “Gold Bible.” Highest hill in this part. Commences to rise away south and is highest near the north end. Here it ends rather abruptly, and the descent on the northwest and east is quite steep and, being covered with grass, slippery. About a block from the north end, trees are found and form quite a grove farther south and a little below ridge. Very few trees near and around the north end. See photos. Years ago, I am told by Mr. Elton, photographer, the hill had considerable timber on, and for many years a long, scraggly tree stood near the top. Oaks are being cut near the north and west side.²⁷

In February 1928 the church purchased the Hill Cumorah along with much of the neighboring acreage, and in the following general conference President Anthony W. Ivins, first counselor in the church’s First Presidency, delivered a sermon about this event that he described as being “of more than ordinary importance to the membership of the church.” He stated:

The memories of the remote past which cluster round this sacred spot, its close association with the opening of the present gospel dispensation, which has resulted in bringing together this congregation of people, for without it this tabernacle would not have been erected, nor would we have been gathered here in worship today, and the thought which we entertain of the possibilities which its bosom may unfold, make the acquisition of this hill almost an epochal accomplishment in the history of the Church.²⁸

President Ivins reviewed the manner in which the sacred records were handed down through time until they were deposited in Cumorah and noted that they “still lie in their repository, awaiting the time when the Lord shall see fit to bring them forth, that they may be published to the world”:

Whether they have been removed from the spot where Mormon deposited them we cannot tell, but this we know, that they are safe under the guardianship of the Lord, and that they will be brought forth at the proper time, as the Lord has declared they should be, for the benefit and blessing of the people of the world, for his word never fails. . . .

These people [from the Book of Mormon] were human, as we are; they carried with them their most precious possessions until the last, and when the end of the mighty struggle came and the result was in doubt, they hid them away in order that they might not fall into the hands of their enemies.

Without doubt, these treasures lie concealed today, some of them, at least, to be brought forth in the not-distant future. How soon this will be we do not know, but this is certain, we
are more than a century nearer that time than we were at the time when Joseph Smith took from their resting place, in the hill Cumorah, the plates from which he translated the contents of the Book of Mormon.

All of these incidents to which I have referred, my brethren and sisters, are very closely associated with this particular spot in the state of New York. Therefore I feel, as I said in the beginning of my remarks, that the acquisition of that spot of ground is more than an incident in the history of the Church; it is an epoch—an epoch which in my opinion is fraught with that which may become of greater interest to the Latter-day Saints than that which has already occurred.²⁹

The next two publications I will describe are different from any of the preceding ones and at the same time are opposite in approach from each other. The first is a historical account with a captivating lyrical quality, while the second is a work of fiction that reads as if it were fact. What unites them is their reverence for Cumorah.

In his 1936 book *Listen for a Lonesome Drum: A York State Chronicle*, Carl Carmer tries to interpret the land of upstate New York, “a country that engages the spirit, summoning strange images.” He writes of “miraculous voices and the beat of the invisible drum” that are part of a mystical quality forming a background for “the spiritual exaltations that have come to dwellers in this country.”³⁰

In a chapter devoted to “The Magic Hill,” Carmer summarizes, with only a hint of disparagement, the story of Joseph Smith, including his first vision, his visits with Moroni, and his translation of the Book of Mormon. The tale is set “in the country around the quiet town of Palmyra [where] many drumlins rise steeply to their rounded tops. Like formal cones in a cubist drawing they give the land a curiously geometric appearance, at the same time artificial and mysterious.”³¹ He then describes the early summer day when he visited the hill and spoke with a missionary. The chapter closes with an account of the “pitilessly hot” day two weeks later when he returned to watch the dedication of the Angel Moroni Monument:

As I sat down four white-clad figures appeared at the foot of the towering canvas far above us. They raised long gleaming trumpets and stood silent for a moment in sharp relief against the blue sky. Then they began to play.

When they had finished a bearded, largely proportioned man who had somehow the look of a prophet stood up on the platform before us. In a deep resonant voice he announced a hymn and as the audience sang it I saw that beside him stood other big men of strong features and dignified bearing. I thought—these people have come back here to a country I have known a long time, in whose little towns I played ball games when I was a boy, a country I have always taken as a matter of course, an ordinary, folksy section. I thought of Mecca and Bethlehem and I suddenly realized that the minds and emotions of a million people over the world were turned at this moment to this hillside just out of Palmyra in [New] York State. . . .

After the last chord crashed out there was a hush and suddenly the canvas fluttered down and flattened out on the ground, and high in the air above us stood a gleaming bronze Moroni clasping a book to his breast with his left hand and pointing heavenward with his right.

Then the big bearded man who had announced the hymn stepped forward and spoke:

“We stand on holy ground,” he said.³²

E. Cecil McGavin, in his 1940 book *Cumorah’s Gold Bible,* offers a treatment that is “purely fictitious, except as historical and factual information is introduced.”³³ He creates a week in July 1939 when all the missionaries in the Eastern States Mission gathered in Palmyra for extensive study of the Book of Mormon. He presents lengthy “quotations” from the guide at the bureau of information and the mission president, in which it is impossible to know where fact and fiction separate. Extracts from actual early-19th-century books mingle with tidbits from “the ‘scrapbook’ of Brother Willard Bean” and “facts” that are given no attribution at all.³⁴ While McGavin’s goal is to prove that Cumorah was “the heart of an ancient battlefield” as “verified by scientists,” the lasting impression is more of uncertainty than of confidence. He puts the following words in the mouth of the fictitious mission president:

This sacred hill . . . became the repository of the record about the people who perished in this region. Enough people here believed that report that they spent much time digging into this the king of the drumlins in search of gold
plates. Many small groups sought for treasure in this place after the Book of Mormon had been published. A large engineering company from Rochester was employed to dig deep trenches and bore long tunnels into this graceful hill in an effort to find plates of metal such as Joseph Smith said he found.

My father visited this place in 1880 and found the surface of the hill scarred with deep ditches, holes and tunnels. The tall grass concealed the smaller holes. He fell into one and nearly broke his leg as he was climbing toward the top of this hill. Many years passed before all the marks of treasure-seeking had been obliterated.³⁵

After the end of the Second World War, scholarly interest in the Book of Mormon and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints increased, and several excellent studies were published over the ensuing decades. As older reports were reviewed and forgotten documents brought to light, increasingly accurate and detailed accounts were written. Examples of those that focus at least in part on the events that took place on and around the Hill Cumorah include the following. Each provides excellent scholarship and thorough documentation of sources.


As the restored gospel shines ever brighter and more broadly in the modern world, the Hill Cumorah and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon receive increasing attention. I will conclude with references to three recent works that are somewhat less scholarly than those just mentioned but that offer fine summaries of the facts and stories relating to the Hill Cumorah.³⁶


Cumorah's Cave

Cameron J. Packer
The hill Cumorah’s significance in the restoration of the gospel goes beyond its being the ancient repository of the metal plates known as the Book of Mormon. In the second half of the 19th century, a certain teaching about a cave in the hill began surfacing in the writings and teachings of several leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In their view, the hill was not only the place where Joseph Smith received the plates but also their final repository, along with other sacred treasures, after the translation was finished. According to some of those leaders, Joseph Smith and others returned the plates to a cave in the Hill Cumorah after he finished translating them. At least 10 different accounts, all secondhand, refer to this cave and what was found there.

With these reports of a cave in the Hill Cumorah comes the question, Was this a real cave that Joseph and others actually walked into, or was it a visionary, or “virtual,” experience? The wording of the accounts leaves the issue open. While this question cannot be answered unless we find firsthand information regarding the cave, what can be learned from these accounts captures our interest. A closer look at them shows that at times they have been used to teach certain gospel principles in a memorable way. Following is a chronological synopsis of the cave accounts (with original spelling and punctuation preserved) and an examination of four associated gospel principles.

1. William Horne Dame Diary, 14 January 1855

Attended meeting a discourse from W. W. Phelps. He related a story told him by Hyrum Smith which was as follows: Joseph, Hyrum, Cowdery & Whitmer went to the hill Cormorah. As they were walking up the hill, a door opened and they walked into a room about 16 ft square. In that room was an angel and a trunk. On that trunk lay a book of Mormon & gold plates, Laban’s sword, Aaron’s breastplate.


In response to a Brother Mills’s statement about the handcart pioneers, Heber C. Kimball said:

How does it compare with the vision that Joseph and others had, when they went into a cave in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry? There were books piled up on tables, book upon book. Those records this people will yet have, if they accept of the Book of Mormon and observe its precepts, and keep the commandments.
3. Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 5 May 1867

President [Heber C.] Kimball talked familiarly to the brethren about Father Smith, [Oliver] Cowdery, and others walking into the hill Cumorah and seeing records upon records piled upon table[s], they walked from cell to cell and saw the records that were piled up.

4. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 11 December 1869

In his journal, Wilford Woodruff recounted what he had heard Brigham Young say about the cave:

President Young said in relation to Joseph Smith returning the Plates of the Book of Mormon that He did not return them to the box from whence! He had Received [them]. But He went [into] a Cave in the Hill Comoro with Oliver Cowdry & deposited those plates upon a table or shelf. In that room were deposited a large amount of gold plates Containing sacred records & when they first visited that Room the sword of Laban was Hanging upon the wall &

when they last visited it the sword was drawn from the scabbard and [laid?] upon a table and a Messenger who was the keeper of the room informed them that that sword would never be returned to its scabbard until the Kingdom of God was Established upon the Earth & until it reigned triumphant over Every Enemy. Joseph Smith said that Cave Contained tons of Choice Treasures & records.

5. Elizabeth Kane Journal, 15 January 1873

Although not a member of the church, Elizabeth Kane lived in St. George, Utah, and entertained the company of Brigham Young. She recorded the following discussion:

I asked where the plates were now, and saw in a moment from the expression of the countenances around that I had blundered. But I was answered that they were in a cave; that Oliver Cowdery though now an apostate would not deny that he had seen them. He had been to the cave. . . . Brigham Young’s tone was so solemn that I listened bewildered like a child to the evening witch stories of its nurse. . . .
Brigham Young said that when Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith were in the cave this third time, they could see its contents more distinctly than before. . . . It was about fifteen feet high and round its sides were ranged boxes of treasure. In the centre was a large stone table empty before, but now piled with similar gold plates, some of which lay scattered on the floor beneath. Formerly the sword of Laban hung on the walls sheathed, but it was now unsheathed and lying across the plates on the table; and One that was with them said it was never to be sheathed until the reign of Righteousness upon the earth.

6. Jesse Nathaniel Smith Journal, February 1874

A southern Utah Saint, Jesse Nathaniel Smith, heard Brigham Young speak in Cedar City, Utah, and recorded:

I heard him [Brigham Young] at an evening meeting in Cedar City describe an apartment in the Hill Cumorah that some of the brethren had been permitted to enter. He said there was great wealth in the room in sacred implements, vestments, arms, precious metals and precious stones, more than a six-mule team could draw.

7. Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, 17 June 1877

Oliver Cowdery went with the Prophet Joseph when he deposited these plates. Joseph did not translate all of the plates; there was a portion of them sealed, which you can learn from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. When Joseph got the plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. He says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light; but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: “This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ.” I tell you this as coming not only from Oliver Cowdery, but others who were familiar with it, and who understood it just as well as we understand coming to this meeting. . . . [Don] Carlos Smith was a young man of as much veracity as any young man we had, and he was a witness to these things. Samuel Smith saw some things, Hyrum saw a good many things, but Joseph was the leader.²

In his book *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, Edward Stevenson relates an interview with David Whitmer in 1877:

It was likewise stated to me by David Whitmer in the year 1877 that Oliver Cowdery told him that the Prophet Joseph and himself had seen this room and that it was filled with treasure, and on a table therein were the breastplate and the sword of Laban, as well as the portion of gold plates not yet translated, and that these plates were bound by three small gold rings, and would also be translated, as was the first portion in the days of Joseph. When they are translated much useful information will be brought to light. But till that day arrives, no Rochester adventurers shall ever see them or the treasures, although science and mineral rods testify that they are there.


In an interview with P. Wilhelm Poulson, David Whitmer gave another account of the cave:

[Poulson]: Where are the plates now?
[Whitmer]: In a cave, where the angel has hidden them up till the time arrives when the plates, which are sealed, shall be translated. God will yet raise up a mighty one, who shall do his work till it is finished and Jesus comes again.

[Poulson]: Where is that cave?
[Whitmer]: In the State of New York.
[Poulson]: In the Hill of Comorah?
[Whitmer]: No, but not far away from that place.


But the grand repository of all the numerous records of the ancient nations of the western continent, was located in another department of the hill, and its contents put under the charge of holy angels, until the day should come for them to be transferred to the sacred temple of Zion.

Gospel Principles and the Cave Accounts

Future Records Yet to Come Forth

While there are variations in each of the cave accounts, one of the most obvious consistencies concerns the additional records present in the cave. All of the accounts except 1 and 6 refer to additional records, whether the sealed “portion of the gold plates not yet translated” or additional “piles” of plates that were around the sides of the cave or under the table. While the number and perhaps identity of the additional records may vary in the different accounts, the message is the same: there are records we do not yet have. This is in harmony with the Latter-day Saint doctrine that God “will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).

One apostle in particular expounded on the future coming forth of these records and what he thought they would contain. In a discourse delivered at the tabernacle in Ogden on 18 May 1873, Orson Pratt said: “Will these things be brought to light? Yes. The records, now slumbering in the hill Cumorah, will be brought forth by the power of God, to fulfill the words of our text, that ‘the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the great deep.’”5 Regarding what these records might contain, Elder Pratt taught, “When these plates, now hidden in the hill Cumorah, are brought to light we shall have the history of the Old Testament much more fully, with the addition of a great many prophecies that are not now contained in the record.” These additional prophecies are, according to Elder Pratt, “the prophecies of Joseph in Egypt . . . [and of] Neum, a great Prophet who prophesied concerning Christ; also those of Zenos and Zenock, and others of which only bare reference is given.”6 Thus we are to understand that such records will yet serve an important role in the future of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

God's Dominion over Earthly Treasures

Another obvious theme in many of the cave accounts is that of wealth or treasure. Accounts 4, 5, 6, and 8 all mention treasures or wealth being inside the cave. It appears that this is an aspect of the cave experience that Brigham Young employed to teach the principle that God has dominion over earthly
treasures and that the Saints should therefore avoid prospecting for silver and gold. For example, in his 17 June 1877 discourse, President Young told the congregation, “You will find just enough [gold and silver] to allure you and to destroy you.”

Just before sharing the cave story, Brigham Young recounted how Porter Rockwell and others had searched for treasure. According to Rockwell, they found treasure but were unable to withdraw it because it kept sliding back into the earth. After sharing the cave experience, President Young said: “Now, you may think I am unwise in publicly telling these things, thinking perhaps I should preserve them in my own breast; but such is not my mind. I would like the people called Latter-day Saints to understand some little things with regard to the workings and dealings of the Lord with his people here upon the earth.”

It must have encouraged the impoverished Saints in the Great Basin to know that God controls great wealth and can bless the Saints with it if it is in their best interest. As Brigham stated in the same sermon, “Are not the earth and the treasures the property of the Lord who created them?”

Jesse Nathaniel Smith’s account also shows Brigham Young highlighting the cave experience to illustrate God’s dominion over earthly treasures. It appears his motive was to help convert church members to the idea of the united order. In Smith’s account, Brigham Young was traveling in southern Utah to organize the united order, or the “Order of Enoch.” Smith wrote:

In February, 1874, Pres. Young sent letters to the authorities at Parowan announcing the inauguration of a new order of life designed to bring about greater harmony among the Saints and to do away with selfish feelings, to be called the Order of Enoch. He soon after started from Salt Lake City organizing the people at the different settlements along the road. With others I met this company at Kanarra and attended the meetings until he reached our place. He spoke with great power upon the all-absorbing theme. I heard him at an evening meeting in Cedar City describe an apartment in the Hill Cumorah that some of the brethren had been permitted to enter. He said there was great wealth in the room in sacred implements, vestments, arms, precious metals and precious stones, more than a six-mule team could draw. Upon arriving at our place he organized all into an order with the local authorities in charge. All my property was valued by the appraising committee and taken charge of by the authorities of the order.

Smith sandwiched the cave account (in italics) between President Young’s teaching on the united order and Smith’s record that he turned all his property over to local authorities. It is possible, of course, that Smith suddenly remembered the cave account and included it in his journal where he did, with the result that it misleadingly implies that Young used the story to illustrate a point he was making about consecration. However, if Smith’s sequencing of events is correct, the question arises that if the purpose of Young’s trip to Cedar City was to convert people to the united order and set it in motion, why did he talk about the cave? What makes this account of the cave
stand out in a journal entry dedicated to consecration is that it pointedly focuses on wealth more than the other accounts do ("great wealth," "precious metals and precious stones"). Perhaps Brigham Young was using the cave experience to illustrate that God is in charge of his treasures and that he will measure them to the righteous and the unselfish who live the united order.

**Grander Principles of the Restored Gospel**

Heber C. Kimball appears to have shared the cave account in one instance to teach the early Saints about the miraculous dealings of God in establishing his church. Kimball was speaking to a group of people in the bowery in Salt Lake City when a man by the name of Mills expressed the opinion that "crossing the Plains with hand-carts was one of the greatest events that ever transpired in this Church." In response, Kimball admitted that the handcart treks were an important event but were not on the same plane as events such as "the visitation of the angel of God to the Prophet Joseph, and with the reception of the sacred records from the hand of Moroni at the hill Cumorah." He then cited the cave story as another example of the "greatest events that ever transpired in this Church." While Kimball did not want to demean the handcart pioneers, he did call attention to what he viewed as the grander dimensions of the restored gospel—visions, revelation, ministering of angels, and additional scripture.

**The Word of God**

Several accounts preserve the distinctive element of the sword of Laban being visible in the cave (see accounts 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8). At first reading, the sword seems even more mystical than the cave itself. But it too can reveal an important doctrinal teaching that may have been significant to early Saints. In scripture a sword is often a symbol of the word of God (see, for example, Ephesians 6:17). In the five cave accounts cited above, the sword’s final resting place was either on the table with the plates or lying across them unsheathed, almost in an obvious attempt to equate the sword with the plates. A possible interpretation is that the word of God that had just been translated from the gold plates is "sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12), an image that would have a powerful effect on the minds of people in this last dispensation (see Alma 31:5).

Accounts 4, 5, and 7 include the detail of a message being associated with the sword. The accounts differ as to whether this message was written on the sword (as in Brigham Young’s account) or was related by an angelic messenger (the Wilford Woodruff and Elizabeth Kane accounts). Regardless of the form of communication, the message was essentially the same: it was a message of conflict. Elder Woodruff’s account states that "a Messenger who was the keeper of the room informed them that that sword would never be returned to its scabbard until the Kingdom of God was established upon the Earth & until it reigned triumphant over Evry Enemy."

It is apparent that several of the early brethren viewed Joseph’s receiving the plates at the hill as the beginning of a war between good and evil. The unsheathed sword may therefore have been a sign that the struggle that began at Cumorah was still going on and that with the completed translation of the plates, the side of righteousness had just gained a powerful weapon in the war against evil—the Book of Mormon. It seems very fitting that the Lord, also known as the “man of war” (Exodus 15:3), would want Joseph Smith and others to know that this mortal experience is indeed a war and that He will conquer the enemies of righteousness. This may have reassured the Saints that divine help was on their side. Within the context of then-current events, namely, severe persecution of the fledgling church, the sword served as an effective teaching tool to emphasize that the Lord’s side would be victorious despite the apparent overwhelming odds against it.

While the cave accounts may stir questions about the Hill Cumorah, perhaps the more important issue is what the firsthand witnesses may have learned from their encounters with the cave and, in turn, how their experiences were used to teach others. It is apparent from the existing records that many of the early church leaders viewed the cave experience as a legitimate event, whether an actual physical experience or a visionary one. By looking at the accounts and the context in which they were shared, one can see that regardless of the metaphysical nature of Cumorah’s cave, it has served to teach important gospel principles—principles such as God’s miraculous dealings with man, his dominion over all things, consecration, and continuing revelation.
Gerald S. Argetinger

Almost every summer since 1935, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has staged a pageant at the Hill Cumorah. Missionaries originally presented these as part of the “Cumorah Conference” of the Eastern States Mission, which was convened annually to coincide with the July 24th Pioneer Day celebration marking the day when Brigham Young first entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. The tradition of the Cumorah Conference was begun in the early 1920s when the mission president, B. H. Roberts, and a group of missionaries traveled from New York City to the newly acquired Smith Family Farm to celebrate Pioneer Day. Part of that celebration included the acting out of scenes from the Book of Mormon and church history.

Over the next decade, the Cumorah Conference expanded to a three- or four-day event and included missionaries serving in both the eastern states and Canada. The program expanded to include sermons, athletic events, a Hill Cumorah pilgrimage, and a variety of entertainment programs to which the public was invited. On September 21, 1923, episodes from the life of Joseph Smith were acted out at the Smith Family Farm, the Sacred Grove, and the Hill Cumorah, marking the centennial of Joseph Smith’s first visit by the angel Moroni. Permission to use the hill was granted by its owner, Pliny T.
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Sexton. “Footprints in the Sands of Time,” a play by John W. Stonely that celebrated the restoration of the gospel, was presented at the Smith Family Farm, honoring the centennial of the church in 1930, to an audience of 200. As part of the annual Palmyra celebration at the Smith Farm, the final pageant was presented on July 23, 1934, by a cast of 30.

The church acquired the Hill Cumorah in the early 1930s, and in July 1935 the Palmyra conference events were moved to the hill. That summer, as part of the dedicatory exercises of the Angel Moroni Monument, “The Book of Mormon in Song, Picture, and Story” was presented, featuring vocal selections by such eminent soloists as Margaret Romaine, formerly of the Metropolitan Opera. For the first time, trumpeters played from the crest of the hill, a tradition that still marks the commencement of the Hill Cumorah Pageant. The theme for the 1936 conference was “America’s Witness for Christ,” and the conference featured a historical pageant, “Truth from the Earth,” adapted by Oliver R. Smith and Meryl Dunn from the works of O. V. Whitney and C. W. Dunn. Mission president Donald B. Colton announced plans to make a pageant at the Hill Cumorah an annual event. Even though there was no specific script, the intent was to present a pageant of quality that would quickly gain recognition as “America’s Oberammergau.”

The next year was the pivotal year in the development of the pageant as we know it. President
Colton appointed a “New York Committee” composed of H. Wayne Driggs, Roscoe A. Grover, Ira J. and Beatrice Markham, William L. Woolf, and Oliver R. Smith. They were responsible for developing an appropriate script for presentation at the hill. Until then all programs had depicted scenes from both the Book of Mormon and church history. In 1937 the two themes were separated and two outdoor dramas were presented. “The Builders,” by Oliver R. Smith, about the Mormon handcart pioneers, was performed on Saturday, July 24. A Book of Mormon play taking its title from the previous year’s theme, “America’s Witness for Christ,” by H. Wayne Driggs, an English professor at New York University, was performed on Friday, the 23rd, and again on Sunday, the 25th. This script, with occasional modifications, became known as the Hill Cumorah Pageant and was presented annually, excluding the war years, for 50 years, from 1937 to 1987. Its purpose was to depict the Book of Mormon as the fulfillment of Bible prophecy and as a testimony of Christ’s divinity. The dramatic structure was chronological, generally following the tradition of the American community pageant, which was to depict independent scenes related to a theme. That first year, it included six episodes from the Book of Mormon: “The Prophet Abinadi,” “Alma the Younger,” “The Sons of Mosiah,” “Samuel the Lamanite,” “Signs at the Crucifixion of Christ,” and “Christ’s Appearance to the Nephites.”

As missionaries grappled with staging the first production of “America’s Witness for Christ,” a new missionary with theatrical experience easily solved some staging problems. His name was Harold I. Hansen, and he was quickly named a codirector of the pageant, working under the supervision of Joseph W. Williams under the supervision of Oliver R. Smith. There is some confusion regarding the responsibilities of persons working on the pageant prior to World War II. Interviews conducted by pageant researchers Charles W. Whitman (1967) and Randy V. Hansen (1978) verify that involved individuals have extremely different recollections. These differences reflect an early rent between the New York Committee and the Utah production personnel that continued for decades. These differing opinions seem to stem from two primary concerns. First, during the early years of the pageant, participants ignored precise theater terminology. Therefore, published credits in advertising, newspaper, and even pageant programs are vague. Second is the fact that over time, the name Harold I. Hansen came to be synonymous with the Hill Cumorah Pageant, dwarfing all others who contributed. His involvement has taken an almost mythical stature. The situation is best characterized by the description of the American Revolution’s history in the musical 1776 (Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards, 1964):

John Adams: . . . I mean, what will people think?
Ben Franklin: Don’t worry, John. The history books will clean it up.
John Adams: It doesn’t matter. I won’t appear in the history books, anyway—only you. Franklin did this, Franklin did that. . . . Franklin smote the ground, and out sprang George Washington, fully grown and on his horse. Franklin then electrified him with his miraculous lightning rod, and the three of them—Franklin, Washington, and the horse—conducted the entire Revolution all by themselves.

To the admiration of many and the chagrin of others, Harold I. Hansen seemingly conducted the entire Hill Cumorah Pageant by himself.

The Wood and Hansen Years

In April 1939, J. Karl Wood was interviewed by David O. McKay, then second counselor to President Heber J. Grant, and called to direct the pageant, the first time a theater professional was brought in from outside the mission to oversee the production. Wood was the director of the Logan (Utah) Pageant Society and, according to his family, was interviewed by President McKay specifically about “directing” the pageant. Wood’s call was extended by a letter from Stephen L. Richards, which adds to the confusion, stating only that Wood was being called to “help out” with the pageant. Wood, who had known Hansen for years, invited him to return after his mission, and the two worked together, dividing producing, technical, and directing responsibilities through 1941, the final year of production before the pageant was suspended for the duration of World War II. The predominant perception is that Hansen served as the artistic director and that Wood served as the technical director.
director during these years. The other view is that Wood was the artistic director and Hansen worked under him. Programs from the 1939–41 pageants add to the confusion because theater terminology is not specific and there is disagreement regarding the meaning of printed credits. It seems reasonable to conclude that Karl Wood was in charge of the pageant. He was called to work at Cumorah and worked with Driggs to revise the script for the 1939 production. It is also reasonable to assume that Hansen returned to Cumorah at the invitation of his friend Karl Wood because of his experience in staging the pageant. Having someone on hand who was instrumental with past productions is a primary method of ensuring continuity. Wood’s expertise was in the area of technical theater and producing, while Hansen’s was in casting and directing actors. Newspaper accounts list both as directors of the pageant and depict the two working side by side on both directing and technical projects.

In 1946, when mission president Roy Doxey revived the pageant, Harold I. Hansen was called as the pageant’s artistic director, a position he filled for the next 30 years. During those years he oversaw script revisions, incorporating episodes depicting King Mosiah, Alma, Ammon and King Lamoni, General Moroni and the title of liberty, and an exciting destruction scene that preceded Christ’s appearance at Bountiful. Hansen also worked to ensure that the pageant incorporated advances in technology, such as the development of unique water curtains and the computerization of stage lighting. Harvey Fletcher, inventor of stereophonic sound, designed, built, and installed a system that utilized state-of-the-art, five-track recording techniques. Another of the most significant modifications came in 1957 when Crawford Gates, then a graduate student at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, composed an original score for the pageant, which was recorded by the Tabernacle Choir and the Utah Symphony Orchestra. This was then mixed with recorded vocal characterizations and sound effects. That master recording was used through the final performance of the original pageant in 1987.

**Winds of Change**

The release of Harold Hansen in 1977 necessitated several changes in the way the pageant was produced. His role as producer/director was divided into two separate positions. Jack Dawson, a retired television producer, was called to serve as the pageant producer. Jack Sedarholm, one of Hansen’s assistants, was called to serve as the artistic director. Sedarholm found himself stuck between a rock and a hard place. Because of his friendship and constant contact with Hansen, Sedarholm felt obligated to maintain the pageant organization and production as it was. Even so, together Dawson and Sedarholm made two major contributions to the pageant.

First was the upgrading of the costumes. Until this time, the pageant had never been designed. In 1937 costumes were borrowed from a closed
Broadway biblical extravaganza, *The Eternal Road*. Wood brought costumes with him from the Logan Pageant Society, and his wife, Phebe, designed and made other costumes. During the Hansen years, costumes were borrowed from the theater department at Brigham Young University. These often reflected what was available rather than what was historically accurate clothing. For example, pumpkin hose and tights from a production of Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* were used for a few years as part of the costumes for Alma the Younger and the four sons of Mosiah. In other years, more appropriate costumes came from the BYU production of Peter Shaffer’s *Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

After Hansen was released, BYU reclaimed all of its major costumes, presenting a challenging problem for preserving a theatrically exciting production. Rochester costume designer Gail Argetsinger was called to design and supervise the construction of appropriate spectacle costumes for the production. She approached the assignment by studying what Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican studies reveal about ancient American dress. The experts at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, also came to her aid in determining what people might actually have worn in American civilizations dating from about 600 BC to AD 400. Argetsinger was allowed to peruse their vast collection, and she also visited other collections of clothing from North and South American native civilizations. When she was called to design appropriate costumes, she was also instructed not to tie any part of the pageant directly into any specific known civilization.

Combining her research with a flair for theatricality, Argetsinger and an army of Relief Society sisters provided costumes for over 600 characters and actors. The impact of that work led the producer and director to embark on what was to become a revitalization of the artistic components of the entire pageant. As the new costumes were used extensively for publicity, it was noted that the poor-quality crepe-hair wigs and beards detracted significantly from the costumes’ effectiveness. As a result, the wardrobe mistress, Barbara Williams, was sent to

Gail Argetsinger designing pageant costumes, about 1982.
New York City to learn the art of crafting hand-ventilated beards and wigs. Argetsinger and Williams worked together on pageant costumes and hair for almost 20 years.

The second major contribution of Dawson and Sedarholm resulted from the 1973 visit by church president Harold B. Lee. He remarked that it was time to phase out missionaries’ participation in the pageant. As a result, the cast now consists entirely of church members, primarily families and single adults, who converge from all over the world to participate in the “pageant experience,” a unique opportunity that is much like a youth conference during rehearsal week and a missionary conference during performance week.

During the years of missionary participation, the focus of the production team was the show itself. When the missionaries were not onstage as actors, they helped with construction and practiced their missionary dialogues. The member-oriented cast found themselves with hours of time, waiting between rehearsal responsibilities. Dawson focused much of his attention enhancing the system of study groups that had been practiced at Cumorah for years. When the pageant was a program of the Cumorah mission, missionaries were the primary actors and technicians. BYU coeds came from Provo to provide the one required female actor and the masses for the crowd scenes. These sisters were organized into study groups that prepared them to mingle with the audience, answering questions and taking referrals. They also ensured that everyone involved enjoyed a unique spiritual experience. It being a missionary program, everyone was expected to be in appropriate missionary dress the entire time they were at Cumorah. Men wore white shirts and ties, and women wore dresses and hose.

Under the new pageant organization, there was no real justification to maintain missionary dress for entire families during the week of hard work and rehearsals. It was clearly a serious burden, particularly for mothers, to maintain Sunday dress for entire families. Dress standards were modified to “appropriate work and recreation clothing” for all work crews and for the cast during rehearsal week, Sunday dress went into effect when the pageant opened to the public. Study groups were changed to “cast teams” and were divided into groups following the same format used in church Primary and youth programs. Cast members continued to study Latter-day Saint church history and the Book of Mormon, and they were taught a “welcoming dialogue” to introduce the audience to the production and invite them to receive a copy of the Book of Mormon. Activities expanded to a speakers’ bureau and Scout and athletic programs. The success of this was verified by scores of letters written by participants proclaiming the “pageant experience” as one of the finest experiences participating families had ever had.

Lund Johnson was called as artistic director for 1986 and 1987, the final two years of the original pageant. Reflecting his southwestern background, he added a golden palomino to the title of liberty scene and directed the 50th anniversary production. When the original script was retired after 50 years, it was the last representative of a lost art form: the American community pageant. Times had changed, and communities had stopped producing founder’s day and Fourth of July pageant celebrations, the tradition from which “America’s Witness for Christ” had developed. The audience was now accustomed to films and television and could not understand a presentation of unrelated “scenes on a theme.” The time had come to completely rework the pageant at Hill Cumorah for a modern audience.

**Following Priesthood Principles**

For the first time a pageant presidency received that calling through priesthood lines of authority. This significantly shifted responsibility for the production from Utah to the Cumorah region. Following priesthood leadership principles, the pageant
presidency was able to solve many of the problems that grew out of specific interests among pageant personnel. Instead of a theater organization reporting to a bureaucratic system of church committees, the priesthood organization provided clear lines of authority for all aspects of production. President Roger Adams, with counselors Jerry Meiling and Gerald Argetsinger, handled the logistical end of the production, including such things as selecting cast members, housing, local arrangements, permits, and budget. Charles Metten, a BYU theater professor, was called as artistic director with the additional responsibility to oversee the unified artistic creation of all aspects of the new pageant.

Orson Scott Card was assigned the responsibility to write the new script that would become the foundation for all other artistic decisions. He was instructed to make the script accessible to a modern audience, targeting the non-scripture-reading, non-Mormon young adult. Card accomplished this by presenting episodes from the Book of Mormon as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is the first script produced by the church wherein the narrative is in a dialogue form that incorporates modern English; the only characters repeating direct quotations from scripture are angels and Jesus Christ. The running time of the new pageant is 1 hour, 15 minutes, approximately 40 minutes shorter than the previous version, allowing families to return home at a reasonable time. A final point of interest is that the older script features the conversion of the Lamanites, while the new script focuses on the story of the Nephites. This change subtly instructs the modern audience that the pageant’s message is not just for those who are not Christian; even though viewers may have the Bible, it is necessary to have the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and priesthood authority as provided by the restoration.

The new script required a new score, so Crawford Gates was again called to compose music for the Hill Cumorah Pageant. For the few similar scenes, such as the nativity, he created new arrangements of established musical themes; for the new scenes, he composed fresh motifs. Finally, the new pageant was scored as motion pictures are, with the music playing continually, underscoring all dialogue and special effects. Eric Fielding designed the new settings and properties, creating seven individual stage units that, when viewed from the audience, create the impression of an ancient Maya temple erected on the side of the hill. Modern lighting shines out from 10 towers that flank the stage, utilizing almost 500 instruments that provide constantly changing patterns of illumination.
Finally, Gail Argetsinger was asked to continue as the costume designer, ultimately replacing all old pageant costumes with over 1,500 costumes specifically designed for the new production. Rodger Sorenson assisted Charles Metten with the preproduction work, and Michael Campbell received a call to create new choreography for the production. Campbell achieved a remarkable transformation by starting with dance appropriate for 600 BC Jerusalem and ending with dance indicative of AD 400 Mesoamerica. As the Book of Mormon civilizations evolved from ancient Jerusalem to Mesoamerica, their dance evolved from one civilization to the other. Metten directed the voice actors, the recording of the special effects, and the mixing of the voice, special effects, and music sound tracks. He also directed the 1988–89 productions at Cumorah, taking responsibility for the initial evaluation and revisions, working closely with Salt Lake offices and the pageant presidency, firmly establishing the new production.

A Test of Faith

Producing the new pageant in 1988 provided everyone involved with some real tests of their faith. It seemed as though everything that could go wrong did go wrong. It reminded the pageant presidency of the story of Gideon as recorded in Judges, chapter 6. Gideon was leading an army of over 30,000 warriors into battle against the Midianites. But the Lord did not want Gideon's people to boast because of a victory, taking claim for the defeat of their enemy. Ultimately, the Lord reduced Gideon’s troops to a mere 300 warriors. When they defeated the Midianites, they knew that their victory was due solely to the Lord. In a similar manner, by the time the new pageant opened on July 22, 1988, everyone knew that its success was due solely to the Lord.

To grasp the magnitude of producing the new pageant, it is important to understand that a typical Broadway musical requires at least two years for development. That includes script writing and revisions; the composing and arranging of music; the designing and construction of sets, “properties” (such as metal plates, weapons, and spoils of war), costumes, and lighting; and finally the casting and rehearsing of the actors. Most elements of the new pageant were developed in less than one year and many in less than six months. Not only did a new, complex, state-of-the-art spectacle have to be conceived and designed, but it was being produced in a setting that was not conducive to this type of creation. Instead, it was being created from the ground up, in the open air, at an active historic site. The pageant’s development involved all phases of theater in addition to a wide array of church committees and General Authorities at all levels, many of whom were already very supportive of the pageant. After all, this was the flagship pageant of the church presented at one of the most important historical sites of the restoration. The committees and departments were responsible for such things as historic sites, visitors’ centers, pageants, building and construction, maintenance, and history. Under perfect conditions, it could have been considered a miracle that the new pageant was even performed in front of a live audience. The difficult bureaucratic and production routine was exacerbated by the fact that 1988 was one of the rainiest summers ever for the Hill Cumorah Pageant.

Some of the more spectacular challenges began with the recording of the music. Crawford Gates had to compose and arrange the music in time for a recording session scheduled over a year in advance with the Tabernacle Choir, the Salt Lake Children’s Choir, and the Utah Symphony Orchestra. There were three days set aside in the Tabernacle for this recording session. If any of those days were missed, it would be impossible to reschedule recording time. Recording time schedules were also strictly controlled by the rules of the Salt Lake Musicians Union, which specified break times and set limits on the amount of time musicians could work each day.

Charles Metten and assistant directors work with model of the set, production week, July 1988.
Just prior to the recording dates, Marion G. Romney, president of the Quorum of the Twelve, passed away. His funeral was set for the second of the three days. One-third of the recording time disappeared. As the second, and final, recording day neared its end and it seemed as though they just might be able to complete the recording, a major problem occurred. The drum head for a special instrument required for the final number would not fit on properly. Nothing the percussionist did seemed to solve the problem. Finally, at the last moment, the head slipped into place and the orchestra began the number. Just as the final note faded away, the union steward blew his whistle signifying the end of the recording session. The musicians immediately applauded, gathered up their instruments, and walked away. They had succeeded by seconds.

In a related incident, when Eric Fielding was contracted to design the set for the pageant, the church assumed that he would be on-site for its construction. Following standard theater procedures, the designer is not responsible for construction, and Fielding assumed that his work was completed when his designs were accepted. Acceptance came slowly. As the project snailied its way through the Church Office Building, it came to a complete stop with the building committee, which determined that the designs did not meet specifications for church stages. Significantly, those specifications were established for permanent indoor stages and not for temporary outdoor events. When it became clear that this delay could actually prevent the pageant stages from being manufactured in time for the July opening, an emergency meeting was arranged for all involved committee heads.

It was finally agreed that the stages were, instead, platforms. As platforms, they satisfied all specifications. The designs were finally given the stamp of approval and were submitted for construction bids. By now, all theatrical construction companies were well into their summer of 1988 production schedule, so no one would even consider bidding on the project. It was late March, and the enormous seven-stage configuration had to be completed in time for construction on-site and rehearsals for a July 22nd opening performance. Once again, an unusual solution was found. The Morton Thiokol Corporation, north of Salt Lake City, was sitting idle because of the Challenger space shuttle disaster. The company agreed to manufacture the stages. Again, no one was contracted to be on-site for the assembly. When the finished pieces of the set were dumped at the Hill Cumorah like a gigantic, scrambled erector set, there was no one to supervise its construction. There was no equipment, just a few ladders, hand tools, and a crew of roughly 30 young men, ages 17 to 22, ready to put things together. In a panic, phone calls were made, and finally Morton Thiokol agreed to send an engineer to supervise construction of the set.

All of the pieces for the set were delivered to the hill with the exception of “stage three,” which contained the apparatus for the ship-at-sea scene. Because of the hydraulic system required to operate the raising, lowering, and rocking of the “ship,” the stage was built in Utah and shipped by truck to New York. Unfortunately, when the truck reached Ohio, it was stopped at the border for three days. It was too
large to receive a permit to travel through Ohio. At Cumorah, the set was going up, the cast had arrived, and rehearsals were under way. Opening day loomed closer and closer, but stage three was nowhere to be seen. The large hole where stage three was to be installed was filling up with water because of the incessant rain. Negotiations for special permission to transport the stage through Ohio failed. Finally, the truck had to travel around Ohio, arriving at Cumorah on Tuesday, just three days before opening. A crane was hired to move it into position on the hill. The enormous crane moved onto the base of the rain-soaked hill and began to lift the heavy stage from the truck. As the stage was maneuvered into position, the crane sank into the mud, obscuring much of the multi-tiered stage. When the crane was finally removed two days later, it was discovered that stage three had been installed backward.

To add insult to injury, the hydraulic-driven ship could rise out of the stage, but it refused to roll back down. It had been tested on the dry cement floor of a factory, but not in the outdoor conditions at Cumorah. At the pageant site, it also became evident that the ship unit was too dangerous to use regardless of its condition. The rocking motion caused sharp metal edges to pass by each other like giant scissors. If an actor accidentally fell, there would be no way to avoid injury. Reluctantly, the decision was made that actors were to “pretend” that a ship was being tossed to and fro by gigantic ocean waves.

The rain continued. Part of Eric Fielding’s design included a beautification of the actual hill. Thousands of square feet of sod were ordered to cover the bare dirt left after the initial grading. However, no money was budgeted to lay the sod. The youth of the Rochester New York Palmyra Stake were ultimately enlisted to lay the sod. It was unrolled in strips up and down the hill. As the rain poured, the newly laid sod slowly slid down the hill. Stakes were finally required to fix it in place.

The electricians installing the lighting equipment on the 10 light towers were all experienced workers in the dry western states. They neglected the ramifications of placing transformers and connection boxes on the wet, grassy hillside of Cumorah. Four days before opening, lightning struck the hill and burned out all of the major theater lighting equipment. Calls were made all over the United States in order to secure replacement equipment, which was installed piecemeal as it arrived—on newly constructed, and grounded, platforms above
the wet grass. When the pageant opened Friday night, it was the first time it had been performed with lighting.

Hour after hour of rehearsal time was washed away by the rain as the cast sat under the protective cover of the study shelter. On Thursday morning, sitting and watching the rain pour down, Jerry Meiling leaned over to me and asked, “How long do you think it will rain?” I paused, thought, and really noticed that everyone’s spirits were up. I had that peaceful feeling when you know the Spirit is with you, so I answered, “I don’t know, but it doesn’t matter.” Jerry paused, smiled, and said, “That’s a good answer.”

By the afternoon of opening day, most of the problems had been resolved at least enough to allow us to know that we could stage a production for people to see. The audience streamed in, the largest pageant audience in years. The opening procession really moved the audience, and the show ran smoothly. The Spirit was strong, and we knew that the pageant was open only because of the hand of the Lord. The next day, the heavens opened and it poured. As it came close to curtain time the second day, lightning struck the light towers again, but this time no equipment was damaged. It was clear that it was too dangerous to continue with the production. For only the seventh time in 51 years, the show was canceled due to rain. This was very hard on the cast, some of whom were sobbing and asking, “Why?” The fact that Gordon B. Hinckley was in attendance removed much of the anxiety. He noted that, in spite of the rain, more referrals were collected that night than opening night, and he gave permission, this one time, for the pageant to be performed on Monday night in order that those who had traveled thousands of miles would have the opportunity to see it. The rains of 1988 turned out to be a tremendous blessing in disguise. Because of the storms, all of the weaknesses inherent in the extensive new project were made manifest. This occurred at a time of great interest in the project. Because the weaknesses were clearly seen by everyone, it was a priority to find the ways and means to solve the problems in order to ensure a quality production for years to come.

**Emphasizing the Spiritual**

Gerald Argetsinger was called to serve as artistic director for the years 1990 through 1997. He was given the charge to keep the pageant vibrant and to coordinate its evolution as it settled in for a long run. He and his team of associate directors continued to discover new and more effective ways to stage the production in order to tell its story in a clear and exciting manner. Argetsinger worked closely with Rick Josephsen, a motion picture special effects director, who was called to serve as the pageant's technical director. They worked to imagine, design, and create an ever-increasing array of special effects that supported the theatricality of the pageant. These included a remarkable storm at sea with rain and lightning striking “the Lehi ship,” sending its sail frayed and flying in the wind; angels that suddenly appeared and disappeared; fire and brimstone in the destruction scene enhanced by the appearance and eruption of a volcano; a new method for creating water curtains that more beautifully displayed the vision scenes; and augmented flying effects for the descending Christ both for his appearance at Bountiful and again at the end of the play, first appearing and descending from 30 feet above the stage and ascending back into the heavens, finally flying almost 50 feet toward the audience.

As the pageant presidency worked with the artistic team during the maturation process, attention continually focused not only on the artistic quality of the production, but also on the overall experience for the participants, as well as on the success of the pageant as a missionary tool. They learned two important lessons. As the spiritual quality of the experience was enhanced, both the aesthetic quality of the show and the quantity and quality of missionary referrals increased. Although it is obvious that a balance is necessary, it became clear that taking time for the participants’ spiritual development and service was more effective than requiring more time for rehearsal. Almost 3,000 referrals were generated in 1997, 10 times greater than the 250 referrals gathered in 1988. The positive response to missionary contacts was also significantly higher.

The development of the spiritual experience for cast members led directly to the second important lesson, the realization that the spirit with which an artistic work is created is communicated to the audience of that work. When every member of the cast and crew strove to improve their own testimonies and spirituality, the impact of the performance was enhanced for each member of the audience. There is a symbiotic relationship between these
various components. For example, as the quality and detail of the costumes improved, it became necessary to provide the cast with appropriate dressing room facilities. The lack of these facilities required that crowd costumes had to fit over street clothing because there was no place to privately change. When dressing rooms that provided for changes were constructed, they allowed the designers to create more appropriate and detailed costumes. Wearing beautiful costumes, of course, has allowed the cast members to greet the audience before production, providing an up-close view of what would later be seen onstage. Naturally, the audience was open to the approach of costumed characters, often asking to have their photos taken with cast members and more eagerly listening to their invitation to receive a complimentary Book of Mormon. When people filled out referral cards, they knew that they would be visited by missionaries who would deliver the book. Since the missionaries were no longer involved in the production, they were usually able to visit referrals within days, instead of weeks, also improving the quality of the contact.

**Embracing the Pageant**

The Hill Cumorah Pageant has become a major media event, drawing almost as many people of other faiths as Latter-day Saints. As the pageant has matured into a more professional production, promotion has also become more professional. Public relations experts Bert Linn and Richard Ahern expanded media coverage from local newspapers to the New York Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, and Good Morning America. This increased tenfold the number of bus tours adding the pageant to their itineraries. When Donny Osmond and his family participated in the 1997 cast, hundreds of newspapers across the country chronicled the event, substantially increasing attendance. As a public relations tool, the pageant is credited with changing the attitude of people within the Cumorah area from antagonistic to positive.

The most notable change occurred in 1991 when local service organizations were invited to provide snacks and meals to pageant visitors. The offer was accepted by the Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis service organizations, which have turned the pageant into their primary annual fund-raising event. Because of their involvement, the community no longer views it as someone else’s pageant, but as “our pageant.” Its acceptance by the community was demonstrated when it was given a full page in The Image Is Rochester (1997), by Gabe Dalmath and G. R. DeFranco, a book describing notable achievements in the Rochester, New York, area. The contributions of the pageant are also chronicled in the mass-market book Mormon America: The Power and the Promise (1999), by Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling. As a missionary tool, cast members circulate among the thousands of visitors who attend each performance, greeting them and extending invitations to receive copies of the Book of Mormon. Most converts in the region credit the Hill Cumorah Pageant as one of the significant experiences in their conversion process. As a spiritually enriching activity for Latter-day Saints, participants value it as one of the finest events in which their families can participate.

The Argetsingers were released from their pageant callings at the conclusion of the 1997 production. By that time, Gail had designed and constructed over 3,000 costumes. It is humbling to realize that much of the revitalization of the pageant stemmed directly from the impact of her first pageant costumes 19 years before. In 1998 Rodger Sorensen became the pageant’s eighth artistic director. Under his direction, it continues to evolve, remaining the flagship pageant of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
THE DELIGHTS OF MAKING CUMORAH’S MUSIC

Crawford Gates and Harold Hansen. Photo courtesy of the author.
I loved the music and considered its general mood appropriate to the Book of Mormon scenes it served. But even then I thought that this magnificent pageant needed its own unique musical score, one tailor-made to suit its singular message. And I hoped to someday have the privilege of composing such music. Little did I surmise that the Lord’s servants would extend to me that wonderful privilege, not once but twice.

During that wondrous first summer on Cumorah’s slopes, I served as a member of the stage crew, with the assignment to turn the water-pipe valve on and off at the proper moment to produce the water curtain that created a misty effect for Nephi’s vision of the Savior. I also lit several of the smoke bombs that helped “destroy” Zarahemla. Clothed in dark dungarees, I would slither, unseen by the audience, through the tall, damp grass to perform these functions in the darkness just beyond the stage areas. Each night before the pageant began, I was at my assigned place. I recall the thrill of seeing the throngs assembling below to witness the wonderful spectacle and of being touched not only by its visions of color, motion, and setting but also by the heart of its message. My participation that year made unforgettable impressions on me.

Before the 1940s ended, I was again in Cumorah’s precincts, this time at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester for two academic years and two later summer sessions. One bleak, snowy day, I drove to Cumorah from Rochester to drink again from the spirit of that sacred place. This particular excursion was in stark contrast to that of the sultry summer of 1941. From the base of the hill, I braced myself against a chill wind and trudged through foot-deep snow up to the solitary Moroni, there in silent metal, high atop the stone monument. I looked up into the eyes of this lifeless but impressive image and pondered the reality of the person behind it—Moroni, that lonely warrior, scribe, prophet, and resurrected messenger of the Most High, who, with kindness and gentleness, tutored the teenage prophet-to-be, Joseph Smith. I tried to visualize those singular interviews, some of which took place near this very spot. Here was the holy ground on which the Lord Jesus Christ...
chose to initiate the reestablishment of his church and kingdom on earth. No wonder that the growing tradition of the Hill Cumorah Pageant has had such lasting impact on those associated with its creation and production and on the hundreds of thousands of observers who have witnessed its power, beauty, and truth.

**Composing the First Score of Original Music for the Pageant**

The summer of 1953, some 12 years after my missionary experiences at “the Hill,” I was back in Rochester, this time putting my full intellectual energies toward the completion of a PhD degree at the Eastman School. My wife, Georgia, and I had married the previous year and were renting a small second-floor apartment. One hot night, Dr. Harold I. Hansen, the artistic director of the Cumorah pageant, and a few of his production assistants came to Rochester to attend a performance of the “Opera Under the Stars.” When a thunderstorm developed, the opera was canceled and Dr. Hansen and his associates visited us instead.

As the storm raged outside, Dr. Hansen disclosed his own hopes and plans for the long-term development of the pageant. Before I knew it, he had informally asked me to compose the original musical score he had in mind. His proposal was later approved and then confirmed by a letter from the First Presidency that extended this appointment to me. The immediate follow-up was Dr. Hansen’s invitation that my wife and I join him at the Hill Cumorah directly after the close of the summer term. Soon we had moved to Palmyra for a week to attend daily rehearsals and an early performance or two. During that time, I was given the script written by H. Wayne Driggs that formed the textual basis of the early Cumorah pageant. Using a stopwatch, I timed the current musical cues and noted on the script the precise locations where they started and stopped.

One memorable afternoon, Dr. Hansen, accompanied by a secretary, took me up the hill and unfolded his intent for the future musical score in terms of its dramatic content and the specific timing of each section. In some cases the new timings differed from the timings I had just taken in rehearsals. His remarks included the instruction that the opening two-minute prelude should create the feeling of “a large wave approaching us, under control but full of promise and power.” At the climax of this wave should be the new “Christ Theme” upon hearing it, we both knew immediately that the music was not good enough, not profound enough. It did not contain the powerful beauty necessary for this fundamental building block of the whole score. So I went back to the drawing board, back to the blank sheet of music score paper, with a new prayer.

Dr. Hansen had hoped that my new score would be ready for use in the 1954 presentation of the pageant. But the task was enormous. It included the creation of a musical score of 72 minutes’ duration for a full symphony orchestra and chorus. The score needed to be of the highest quality. It was to be dramatically appropriate to the Driggs script and was to enhance the drama of the great Book of Mormon stories. It had to be beautiful and attractive to a wide public. It needed to meet the artistic vision of Dr. Hansen and to be permeated with spiritual depth throughout. This was a tall order. On the other side, my 60-hour workweek on the
Brigham Young University music faculty was not reduced, and my ward callings and assignments in connection with the MIA General Board continued. Georgia bore our first son that fall and was soon pregnant with our second child. There simply was not time to create a score in the ensuing 12 months.

My first task was to compose the “Christ Theme.” I made over a dozen preliminary sketches, discarding each of them. I even orchestrated one of the later ones and had the BYU Symphony and Choir read and record the same, with Dr. Hansen present, in the empty auditorium of the Joseph Smith Building on the BYU campus. Upon hearing it, we both knew immediately that the music was not good enough, not profound enough. It did not contain the powerful beauty necessary for this fundamental building block of the whole score. So I went back to the drawing board, back to the blank sheet of music score paper, with a new prayer. If I expected the incomparable blessing of inspiration to help me fulfill this calling, I needed to improve my own spiritual life, to recleanse myself. Georgia and I went to the temple more often. I taught a Book of Mormon class at BYU to more fully immerse myself in this scripture. Dr. Hansen and I both received special blessings at the hand of Apostle Harold B. Lee. My blessing was a particularly wonderful one. When I returned home, I recorded in writing as much of it as I could remember. Its conditional promises were indeed fulfilled in my behalf and in behalf of the missionary thrust of the Cumorah pageant.

One of the great blessings of my life has been the fact that this creative effort also yielded one of my life’s greatest satisfactions, that of believing that many others have felt value in this music. The initial score for the Cumorah pageant ran from 1957 through 1987, totaling 248 performances of the pageant during 31 years. I do not wish to inflate my own service as a composer of music, but I have to humbly admit that I find great personal joy in knowing that the Lord invited me, through his servants, to provide this accompaniment to his message and that this music had an apparent value toward that objective. One naturally hopes that others will find meaning and value in one’s deepest efforts. I have found such a wondrous blessing in my small contribution to the success of the Hill Cumorah Pageant.

Composing a New Score for a New Script

In early 1987 I was contacted by Michael Moody of the church’s General Music Committee. He informed me that the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve had approved a new effort to write and produce the Hill Cumorah Pageant. I was happily surprised to learn that I had received the appointment to write the musical score for this new production. Orson Scott Card had been commissioned to write the script, and Dr. Charles Metten was to be the artistic director of the pageant for its first two years. I was delighted to collaborate with Charles again. He and I had worked together 21 years earlier in producing Verdi’s *Aida*.

On 31 July the creative team assembled at the hill. We all bade good-bye to an old and dear friend, the earlier pageant. The next morning we no longer looked back. A new vehicle for the Lord’s Spirit to be manifested was to be born. We felt the power of inspiration being harnessed and placed in unison toward a single objective. We rejoiced in the priesthood leaders who gave inspired directions and blessings. It was a day of vibrant planning and vision, the start of a fresh tradition.

In September I met with Charles in Chicago, and for two days we delved deeply into Orson’s new script. Each line of dialogue, each stage action, and each pause was timed to establish the parameters
of the musical composition. Charles’s ideas for the character of the music were noted in my copy of the script. This meeting between artistic director and composer was essential for me. The recording sessions with the Utah Symphony and Mormon Tabernacle Choir were set for 24–26 May 1988 (later changed to 25–27 May 1988 because of President Marion G. Romney’s funeral on 24 May). I laid out a special calendar for the next seven months. I was conductor of the Beloit Janesville Symphony and was artist in residence at Beloit College. I divided these two professional obligations into small units of time by the week to free up time for my work on the music for the pageant. From that point on, my workdays started at six o’clock each morning and ended at midnight.

Charles wanted “wall to wall” music, except for 40 seconds of silence following the crucifixion. The total was 78 minutes of music. I blocked off a certain number of workdays for each section and began writing the music to fit precisely the action and dialogue of the script, scene by scene.

On 4 December I was to appear before some of the General Authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City. The Missionary Committee wanted to hear some of the music that was being prepared for the new pageant. It was, in effect, a command performance. The only practical way to respond was for me to play a portion of the score on the piano. I elected to play the “Cumorah Processional,” an orchestral opening to the pageant. Charles’s vision was for the processional to start at full volume at the back of the meadow. At the same moment, the lights were all to turn to catch the full impact of 600 people in colorful costumes, who then were to march with enthusiasm through the audience, greeting them by gesture, to the main stages on the lower part of the hill. Charles determined the time required to move 600 people to places on the stage was two and a half minutes, so this was the duration of the processional I was to compose. I practiced a piano reduction of this piece in preparation for my presentation.

Another subtle but important aspect of this 4 December meeting was the fact that the production budget for the 1988 pageant had not been fully approved, even though substantial monies in production costs had already been spent. Charles hoped that the enthusiasm for the pageant’s music generated at this meeting would be the catalyst for budget approval.

The day arrived. I flew to Salt Lake City and appeared ahead of time at church headquarters. I did not know what kind of piano I would have available for my performance. I envisioned a shining six-foot grand piano, or larger, with a fine bench. But the meeting room had a vintage upright piano whose appearance did not give me confidence. A further problem arose: most of the chairs in the room had armrests, which render piano playing impossible. Someone brought forward a

Excerpt from Crawford Gates’s handwritten score for the pageant. Courtesy of the author.
metal folding chair from the back corner of the room, but it was too low to allow any power or speed in performance. There were no pillows or other objects to raise the height of the chair, so I placed my briefcase at an angle and sat on its unstable surface. My appearance did not promote my dignity or the observers' confidence. I looked more like I was imitating Victor Borge's comic sketches. Should the pageant's future (including its budget) and my own reputation as a serious composer rest on such dismal performance circumstances?

The moment of truth arrived. Charles briefly outlined the status of the new effort and emphasized the mammoth job that still lay ahead. He then turned to me to comment on the status of the musical score and to perform a sample so that all could experience something of its spirit. I looked at the august audience, which included three members of the Quorum of the Twelve. I knew and honored them all and knew they supported my effort. But the stakes were high. The hoped-for budget from church funds was very substantial, and the national visibility of the Cumorah pageant, especially in its new dress, would be wide and important. I do not remember what I said, but there was a good climate. I had offered many prayers in behalf of the success of the Cumorah effort years ago. But now I offered a new prayer—that in spite of my shortcomings and those of the performance circumstances, I might communicate the vibrancy and testimony in my heart that would eventually be the essence of the new pageant's music.

I took off at the keyboard as though I were playing my debut in Carnegie Hall. My performance was not perfect—I played a few wrong notes—but it had lots of heart. I played my soul out for the longest two and a half minutes I can remember. I wondered if I would ever get to that last bar. When I did, the response was wonderful. I saw in the faces of those faithful servants of the Lord that they had heard and seen what was in my heart and soul. And they blessed me with their warm, enthusiastic approval. Charles received assurance that his full budget was approved, and I was encouraged to continue my intensive work on the score. We all left the brief meeting in a state of euphoria. I felt like the Prophet Joseph must have felt after the Three Witnesses saw the angel and the plates. No longer was he the only witness, and he had great relief. Up until 4 December 1987, no one but me knew the content of the forthcoming music. Now there were others and they shared my joy.

As the weeks wore on, I got behind on my projected completion date of 1 May. Periodically I had a clear view of what might happen, what I called my “vision of terror.” In my mind’s eye I saw the opening rehearsal in the Tabernacle. I saw the famous choir in their seats, beautifully calm and well prepared. I saw the smooth professionalism of the 90 performers of the Utah Symphony, all ready in their seats with instruments tuned. I saw my respected colleagues, Drs. Robert Cundick and Clay Christiansen, at the great Tabernacle organ. I saw the recording engineers in the control room. I saw the Salt Lake Children’s Choir in disciplined quiet, awaiting their first cue to stand and sing.
their hearts out. I saw a porcupine of microphones sticking up everywhere to catch the majesty of the anticipated sound. I saw myself standing before this incomparable assembly and heard myself say, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t finish.”

In imagining this unthinkable moment, I said aloud to myself, “This should not happen! This must not happen! This will not happen!” Then I offered a prayer for help and moved to work faster and harder so that I would finish the work with the highest quality and beauty of which I was capable, and especially on time! I recall so vividly the day of Thursday, 20 May 1988, when in the Salt Lake Tabernacle the combined musical resources did indeed materialize. The great choir was there, so splendidly trained by Dr. Jerald Ottley; the magnificent Utah Symphony Orchestra was there, augmented by six percussionists; the Tabernacle organists and the Salt Lake Children’s Choir were there; and the recording engineer, along with his highly qualified associates, was there. But unlike the outcome in my vision of terror, I had finished the score. As I stood on the podium facing these incomparable musical resources, more than 450 of them, my heart burst with thanksgiving to my Heavenly Father.

The rehearsals went well. The six professional music copyists who had helped copy the voluminous orchestral parts had done their work splendidly. A live concert performance of the complete work was held in the Tabernacle to a full house on Saturday, 21 May. Spencer Kinard served as narrator at my invitation, reading a brief text in advance of each of the 11

Crawford Gates conducting the Tabernacle Choir, the Utah Symphony Orchestra, and the Salt Lake Children’s Choir for a recording in 1988 of the music he composed for the Hill Cumorah Pageant. Photo courtesy of Gerald S. Argetsinger.
movements. At the conclusion, by my recollection, the audience arose with a roar of fervor and approval. This night was one of the most memorable in my life.

On Tuesday through Thursday of the following week, three recording sessions were held in the Tabernacle with these same musical forces. These sessions were three hours each, with a 20-minute intermission per hour. In most commercial and professional recordings of orchestra (and chorus) anywhere in the world, each three-hour recording session would typically result in 15 minutes of flawless final recording. For a 78-minute work, such a time budget would normally involve six three-hour recording sessions. For a number of reasons, including economic, we determined to record the complete score in just three sessions. The recording time was further cramped by the fact that the Salt Lake Musicians Union had changed its hourly intermission requirement from 10 to 20 minutes.

Our earlier concert performance certainly helped toward the preparation of the recording, but I felt under intense pressure to obtain 26 minutes of final recording from each recording session. We finished good takes on all movements and sections, including retakes, by 30 minutes before the end of the last session. However, there were about eight more retakes, some small, that needed to be rerecorded in those final 30 minutes. I had all but one of those musical passages located in the lengthy score when the last 30-minute sequence started. We got within three minutes of the final moment, with only one retake to record, but it was the one I had not located in the score. So I spent about 30 seconds of that time frantically searching through the large pages to find the correct location. When I found it, I needed to instruct the musicians in four notation changes. We rehearsed the changes once. The union steward spoke out that I had only 40 seconds before going into high overtime costs. I told him in a breath that was all the time I needed. The engineers in another second said, “Tape’s already rolling!” My preliminary measure gave the players the correct tempo, then the four bars in question received the definitive recording, and I gave the final cutoff just as the second hand of the clock on the wall crossed the precise closing second. We all cheered each other for this hairbreadth ending of a wonderfully successful series of recording sessions, particularly the final tense moments.

Chief recording engineer John Neal, Bonneville engineer Loren Ashcraft, sound design engineer Michael McDonough, and Bonnevile director of music Merrill Jenson got together for a number of days of mixing and editing the music for the various purposes for which the recorded tape would eventually be used. Charles directed the work of combining the music track with the recorded voice track and sound-effects track for use at the hill, and Jerald Ottley and Ralph Woodward Jr. helped edit the choral portions. The editing and mixing took a total of 11 working days.

The final sound track was reproduced for all assistant directors at the hill so it could be used in rehearsals with the large cast in July 1988. The recording was balanced at the hill, locking it into its final format from that point.

When the sound engineer demonstrated the volume of the sound track, echoing the music off the hill into the meadow below, I walked alone across the meadow in the darkness of the night, enveloped by this magnificent wash of music—music that the Lord had given me to honor his holy name and to assist in pronouncing to the world the truthfulness of his latter-day work. Deeply moved by the wonder and joy of this sacred moment, I fell to my knees in thanksgiving for the privilege of composing the sacred music for a pageant that celebrates the Book of Mormon and reaches so many people.
DESIGNING HILL CUMORAH
COSTUMES FOR THE PAGEANT

By Rory R. Scanlon
SINCE ITS INCEPTION in 1917, the Hill Cumorah Pageant has become a significant stage spectacle. Presented before an audience averaging 14,000 observers nightly, it is the largest outdoor production of its kind. The visual presentation involves some 650 performers wearing a combination of well over 1,000 costumes. Designing, creating, and maintaining such an extraordinary wardrobe becomes a balancing act as directors and designers work within the limits of outdoor drama to use costuming that makes for effective visual storytelling and also is reasonably true to the different time periods it represents. What’s more, approaching the costume design of such a unique production requires an innovative interpretation of Book of Mormon story locations and a creative realization of costume history.

Meeting the Pageant’s Physical Challenges

Outdoor theater exhibits a style unlike that of most stage productions. An audience attending an indoor presentation might not think about the structural design of the auditorium and how it provides positions for lighting and the ropes and pulleys for scenery. Yet that same audience expects a quality performance in an outdoor arena, where lack of walls and ceilings makes the production a daunting challenge. Like scenic and lighting design, costuming too must be adapted to an open-air stage. As this article will show, distance from the audience, a typically short rehearsal period, and inclement weather are significant factors in the final costume design.

Distance is a key visual concern for outdoor drama. Viewers will not readily identify characters if costume color and detail do not project well from the stage to the expanse of the audience. But the unique nature of the pageant as a missionary tool adds another layer of costume requirements. Before each show, actors in full character dress mingle with the audience to deliver brochures and answer questions about the upcoming performance. At this time the audience is close enough to examine, touch, and photograph the costumes as part of the pageant experience. Accordingly, costuming must be realistic enough to bear close-up scrutiny yet broad enough in detail to “read” at a great distance once moved to the stage. For this reason, the costumes are designed on two levels.

The first level concerns the actual materials used. Though contemporary fabrics can rarely match the textures of historical textiles, loose weaves and specialty cloths are used to represent the hand-produced look of Old World costumes. Because volunteers sew the costumes, their hours must be carefully utilized for maximum effect.

The second level concerns how these textures and details will blend together onstage. Too much detail will muddy at a distance. Too many colors will only confuse the eye. The designer must choose colors and details in a value range that will achieve the proper effect at a distance. Much like the pointillist dots of color in a painting by Seurat, the costumes assume a tone onstage that ties like colors together in harmony and pulls disparate colors apart in sharp contrast. So while the fine detail will appeal to the individual audience member in close proximity, the intricate colors and textures will work together under the stage lights to offer rich color tones during the performance. Employing these techniques helps ensure that the costumes are successful both as close-up and distant designs.

The short rehearsal time becomes the next challenging factor for costuming the pageant. Each summer the 650 performers arrive five days before...
the first full-dress rehearsal. Casting takes place on the first Saturday morning, when the actors are assigned their roles. Costume fittings begin within minutes of those decisions. Alterations are kept to a minimum since stitching and cutting considerably limit a costume’s usable life. Consequently, the costumes must be adaptable to a range of body shapes and sizes. This requires a structural design that allows for quick alterations in length and width. Whenever possible, adjustment capabilities are built into the costumes. Fortunately, the kind of clothing worn by Bible and Book of Mormon peoples allows for such adaptations.

Most of the garment shapes from the ancient world could accommodate significant changes in the wearer’s body shape and movement. For example, long articles of clothing were “girded up” about the waist for work and travel, allowing the legs to move freely. Loose pieces were bound to the torso with long sashes to allow upper-body movement. Overall, large pieces of fabric allowed a loose environment for the body. Length could be adjusted by the simple use of a waist sash. People owned fewer changes of clothing and kept them longer than we do in a world where ready-made clothing is so easy to find. Because thread had to be hand spun, fabric had to be hand loomed, and clothing had to be hand prepared, final clothing pieces were valuable. In fact, they were frequently offered as collateral in place of money (see Exodus 22:26–27; Matthew 5:40). People slept in their clothing, especially when traveling, because laying aside an article of clothing might mean having it stolen during the night. By working closely with authentic pattern shapes, the costume designers for the Hill Cumorah Pageant capitalize on the adaptive nature of the historical clothing. While elastic, belting, and Velcro might be added internally to help contemporary actors wear unfamiliar clothing pieces, the outward construction of the costumes stays very close to the historical shapes of the ancient world. Thus historical accuracy offers simple solutions for making the costumes adaptable to varying body sizes.

Another physical challenge of outdoor theater is the weather. The Hill Cumorah Pageant is staged during the first few weeks of July, when New York State evening temperatures can fluctuate widely. Humidity is high, rain is always a possibility, and the actors’ perspiration is a constant. Here again, costume solutions come through historical findings. Cotton and other agave fibers were common ancient American choices for fabric construction.¹ They could be spun in light- or heavyweight varieties, they allowed excellent airflow to help the body maintain a comfortable temperature, and they held up well in humidity. Such fibers have proved to be strong choices in the New York environment for the same reasons, offering comfort for the actors and ease of maintenance for the wardrobe.

From initial construction through performance and into storage, the costumes are maintained in top working order by a skilled volunteer staff. The actors receive training on the proper care of their costume pieces. Laundry facilities are available on-site for costumes that need quick attention. Damaged items are dealt with promptly and professionally to ensure the actors’ safety and comfort as well as a consistent visual look during performances. Throughout the year, the costumes are stored in a facility with a fairly consistent temperature. Through all these means, the costumes can survive the climatic and other challenges of repeated outdoor use.

Visual Storytelling

Theater as an art form relies on a director and that person’s vision of a script. Obviously, the costume, scenic, and lighting designers consider the visual “story” of the characters on stage. But more importantly, their designs must embody the message of the entire production as seen through the director’s eyes. Again, the Hill Cumorah Pageant offers its own unique application of this collaborative process. Charged with training a cast of some 650 actors in 78 scenes during a five-day rehearsal
period, 10 directors supervise the full staging of the pageant. Following the leadership of one executive director, this team works in numerous rehearsal locations at the same time to bring the entire story to life. This requires a unified vision of what the pageant needs to say to its audience and how that message must flow from one scene into the next. Each spring, the team of directors meets to consider the script page by page. All directors review videos of the last year’s production. They discuss scenes that worked well and scenes that need further development. They plan the upcoming year’s rehearsal process, and each director receives assignments for the upcoming pageant. During this spring meeting, the designers offer input regarding the storytelling process. Visual research is presented, and ideas for new looks are discussed. And then, with only months to go, construction begins on any new or revised costumes.

The most important consideration for each revisiting of the pageant is how to tell the story in a way that will make its message clearer for the audience. Past pageants emphasized visual spectacle within each individual part of the story. The original costumes and large set pieces supported that concept. Each story segment stood on its own in a succession of scriptural stories. But over the past few years, the aim has been to tie the individual stories together into one cohesive unit. The current directors want the pageant to tell a powerful tale of human agency: the universal message that following the teachings of Christ will ultimately lead a people to great blessings, while ignoring those teachings will ultimately lead to their destruction. This new approach requires that the costumes tell a much larger story.

To visually support that overriding theme, the costume design is being reconceived to show a constant similarity between each of the prophets portrayed in the pageant, even as the time periods change. While historical silhouettes must remain accurate for each location and time, an overall evolution of color and detail must underlie the primary message. The design team has decided that earth
tones and simple silhouettes will draw visual parallels between different generations who accept the messengers of Christ. In contrast, artificial colors and multiple layers of detail will cloud the forms of those who deny the prophets. To the audience, a rich display of increasing costume detail reflects the social development of a people drawing further away from the gospel. This color-and-layer approach demonstrates how the theatrical nature of the pageant must sometimes overrule historical accuracy. Obviously, different colors and clothing layers were worn by people from all walks of life, but in this production visual control of color and costume layers underlies the message of the script. Logistically, this redesign, which began in the summer of 2003, will rework the entire 1,072 costumes of the pageant over a five- to six-year period. Targeted segments will be handled annually in careful succession so that, during the process of integration, the new costumes will work with the old costumes in telling the stories as effectively as possible.

Each year the costumes change in one way or another, though only minor steps can be taken in any one year toward a greatly different look. Any redesign of the Hill Cumorah Pageant must recognize the foundation laid by past designers and their contribution to the full pageant vision. Janet Swenson helped create the original look of the pageant during its formative years. With her theatrical training, she helped originate the spectacular look of an outdoor production. She used costumes from Brigham Young University stock and some garment pieces created on-site to complete the look. Gail Argetsinger worked on an arduous redesign of an entirely new set of costumes during the late 1980s and early ’90s, bringing the pageant to an exciting and historical level. Informed by the best research at her disposal, she oversaw various refinements that enhanced the colorful and majestic visualization of the Book of Mormon narrative. Many other hands have touched the pageant over the years, incorporating costuming ideas gained from ongoing research. Much like the world of fashion, each new clothing piece evolves slowly from the last. Eventually, a new look will be achieved, but from year to year, the process will be gradual.

**Historical Reconstruction**

Costuming the Hill Cumorah Pageant would be much more difficult if it were not for solutions found in the historical world of the stories represented. As already mentioned, the period clothing of Book of Mormon peoples had to address many of the same physical problems encountered by a contemporary cast on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah. The daily life of Book of Mormon peoples was an open-air experience: temperatures varied, the climate was naturally humid, and the physical nature of daily routine demanded practical clothing styles that allowed range of movement and easy adjustment for fit. History also informs the directors’ concept of individual Lehi and faithful family members partake of the precious fruit of the tree of life—a pageant segment that is being redesigned.
Research indicates that the dress of peoples likely related to Book of Mormon peoples in time and place showed elaborate costume detailing for those of wealth and high social status. In contrast, the humble lower classes likely wore clothing that was plain and simple. This simple fact was a major consideration in planning a new look for the pageant consistent with its overall theme.

As the redesign process began, it was necessary to study Book of Mormon geography and ancient dress. The directors felt it was important to keep religious and archaeological research separate, at least in direct application. While one can educate the other, historical research can be strongly persuaded by religious dogma, often obscuring the actual discovery of human individuality in the process.

For costume design, it is imperative that each character be seen as a living, breathing individual in a real world. Once the designers have a strong sense of how the costumes’ historical detailing can reflect actual social structure, they create initial designs and then modify them as needed to address vital stylistic demands. This process is especially important when designing costumes for well-known religious personalities, since religious groups tend to deify them and place them into idealized worlds. Thus a strong sense of factual research must come first. Fortunately, the costume design that would match the pageant’s new direction was attached to a research project already well under way through several grants from the College of Fine Arts and Communications at Brigham Young University. This project, involving BYU student assistants and a faculty supervisor, had begun in 1998. Copies of illustrations and photographs of historical figures were archived, and an exhaustive bibliography of books, articles, and reference materials were compiled. The project to date has accumulated a rich collection of images sorted into a historical chronology based on archaeological periods for the ancient Near East and ancient America. These scientific timelines are then superimposed onto a new period breakdown that matches the storytelling accounts of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. With the aid of this project, the pageant’s scriptural characters were placed within their applied archaeological periods (and broad geographical contexts), facilitating further library research on clothing practices of the ancient peoples associated with those basic identifications.

To make full use of the research, Book of Mormon geography had to be addressed with greater specificity. While controversy still surrounds this issue, contemporary scholarship on the subject proposes helpful regional identifications. Two comparative studies by John L. Sorenson and Joseph L. Allen helped to sort through the various hypotheses concerning the location of Book of Mormon geography...
Mormon lands. Initial study showed that the majority of Latter-day Saint scholars tend to place Book of Mormon events within Mesoamerica. It became obvious that while Aztec and Inca images dominate most current Latter-day Saint visual images of Book of Mormon peoples, these cultures were much too late to satisfy a Book of Mormon world. Historical mapping and population studies\textsuperscript{6} indicate that the greatest rise and fall of human populations during the period of the Book of Mormon likely centered in Mesoamerica.

With a general region provisionally determined, associated historical cultures needed to be identified and studied. Archaeological studies seemed conclusive for an Olmec-Maya dominance within this region, with smaller influences from the Mixteca in the north, the Zapotec in the central region, and the Moche in the far south. While these identifications were only broad brushstrokes in a complicated interrelationship of ancient names and cultural movements, they at least offered pageant designers a context for a more concentrated study of ancient dress. It was not necessary to definitely tie any one Book of Mormon site to a particular Mesoamerican center, since clothing influences make a much larger sweep in historical contexts. What’s more, comparative studies reveal that the most basic clothing pieces from northern Mexico all the way to the mountains of Peru varied little in original shape. The regional differences in the clothing had much more to do with details like how each piece was worn or some unique outerwear additions than with overall shape and design.

What became even more interesting in the initial research were the strong similarities between Mesoamerican and Old World garments. Costume pieces from Chiapas, Mexico, and the highlands of Guatemala offer striking resemblances to the clothing of the world that Lehi left, both in original construction and in finished garment shapes. The pageant designers decided to spend much of their time in Mesoamerican studies to uncover cultural clues to meet production requirements.

Now began the second level of research needed to complete the costume designs. Designers studied the collected research images to identify basic shapes and clothing pieces that were common to males and females. They carefully reviewed the work of Patricia Anawalt and of Margot Schevill, both costume experts of the Mesoamerican regions. While the bulk of the research deals mainly with the Classic and Post-Classic periods (AD 250 to 1500), a comparative study of earlier garments disclosed a long history of common clothing shapes. Anawalt’s categorization of clothing according to construction techniques helped the designers to identify clothing styles heavily influenced by Mesoamerican cultures.\textsuperscript{7} The categories also helped them to pinpoint cultures whose costume shapes were unique, informing judgment on costume detailing for specific locations.

Another approach for studying ancient garments deals with direction of fabric drape. Some civilizations (such as the Greeks) draped fabrics horizontally, wrapping the body in consecutive layers of cloth. Other cultures (such as the Romans) tended to place fabric vertically on the body with a “hem to hem” philosophy. These garments frequently included a slot for the head to protrude through. Still other cultures (such as the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians) blended these two approaches. Judging from our research, the style of the Mesoamerican region was also a blend of the two. The male maxtlatl (or loincloth) wrapped repeatedly around the waist and once or twice between the legs and then ended in a full front hang or was knotted somewhere at the front of the body. While this garment followed the horizontal trend, the male ichcahuipil and the female huipil were created from lengths of fabric draped over the shoulders and stitched up the front and down the back, leaving an opening for the head. These garments followed the vertical drape approach. In this study, Mesoamerican clothing...
showed strong similarities to the historical blend of fabric drapes found in Egypt and Mesopotamia.

A clothing practice that showed a strong similarity to the Old World was the use of embroidery work, especially on the female garment. A woman in Old Testament times spent countless hours hand stitching around the neck opening and the immediate neck-front placket of her kthoneth (a basic slip-on tunic). Likewise, Mesoamerican women added extensive embroidery to the neck and front of the huipil. In both cases, the embroidery added color and individuality to the garment while offering reinforcement to the neck opening. Colors used in both regions were quite similar, both in color range and in dye materials.⁸

However, one strong difference in construction became apparent in our research. While the ground loom was most common in the world of the Bible,⁹ the backstrap loom was more common in Mesoamerica.¹⁰ The choice becomes obvious when one understands the climates of Mesoamerica. For instance, much of the year the soil is muddy and unusable as a work surface. The backstrap loom allowed the weaver to relocate easily and to work either indoors or outdoors. The Old World ground loom manufactured wide fabrics that allowed the weaver to produce full wraps in one piece, without having to seam together several individual widths. The backstrap loom, on the other hand, offered only narrow fabric strips. This required more handwork as the strips were sewn selvage to selvage to produce the finished width. Mesoamerican clothing, on the whole, contained less fabric than Old World garments. However, the amount of handwork involved produced more color and detail in the Mesoamerican finished garments.

Because of the humid climate, ancient Mesoamerican fabrics have not survived to our day to take the guesswork out of fabric research. However, higher-elevation Peruvian climates have preserved many exciting samples of fabrics created by advanced weaving techniques, suggesting that this technology was known throughout the time frame of the Book of Mormon.¹¹ A few scraps of ancient fabric discovered in the cenotes (water holes) of the Petén region of Mesoamerica exist,¹² but since they were preserved in water, a great deal of fiber distortion and loss of dye work has taken place.

The costume design research had to focus on two very important concepts as it progressed. First, the discovered images in Mesoamerica known to the world today deal almost entirely with the upper echelon of the civilization. The figures depicted on the stelae (stone monuments) and architectural surfaces were leaders. Even most of the artisans and scribes of the Mesoamerican cultures were members of royal families.¹³ We have less information about what common people wore. Second, and closely related, the vast majority of the images in the iconographic style of Mesoamerica represent people as embodied gods with symbolic headpieces and costumes. While it seems safe to suppose that similar pieces were worn during rituals, it has to be assumed that
they were not daily attire. Thus, costumes as represented in a majority of the research images are “theatrical” by nature and not necessarily representative of everyday dress.

From the research accumulated, designers found strong theatrical images on which to base the costumes for official characters, especially those in ritual settings. The research also offered clues to the clothing worn by common people, at least in garment shapes and layers. But some interpretation was necessary for the entire scope of the pageant’s costume design to emerge. To remain true to history, elaborate costumes from the Classic period of Mesoamerica were reserved for final segments of the pageant. The elaborate nature of these ritualistic costumes offered a strong visual representation of how far people had gone to represent a God they had ceased to understand.

In contrast, costumes in the beginning of the pageant would have to lean toward a strong Old World flavor with earth tones, textures, and larger garment pieces from a world with greater temperature differences. This look, again, supported the directorial concept of a beginning that displays people who are both close to the earth and simple in their faith and lifestyle.

Bringing Home the Message

The costume design for the Hill Cumorah Pageant reflects a strong understanding of the physical and artistic needs of the production as well as a good grasp of the historical setting of the Book of Mormon. Through a rich blending of theatrical techniques, the pageant dramatically re-creates scriptural episodes to underscore the wisdom of human agency based on moral choices—a message made poignantly relevant by the historical realism conveyed in large part by authentic costuming. It is anticipated that the finished garments will help transport the audience to an ancient world split into those who chose to follow the prophets and those who did not. While this might be an oversimplification of a complicated society, it is true to Mormon’s own worldview, as reflected in his use of the terms Nephite and Lamanite.¹⁴ Hopefully, audiences will come away from the pageant having drawn instructive parallels between their world and that of the Nephites. Conceivably, those who wove fabrics, dyed materials, and constructed clothing in a day gone by can help educate us as we live in our own world of human choices and very human needs.
A NEW BEGINNING FOR THE PAGEANT: 1948 TO 1951

Harold I. Hansen

Harold I. Hansen directed the Hill Cumorah Pageant from 1937 to 1977 (excluding the years 1943–47). He passed away in 1992. The following excerpt from his unfinished history of the pageant is published here for the first time, with minimal editing. —Ed.
The Hill Cumorah Pageant was a memory in the spring of 1948. The last performance had been in the summer of 1941. Since then I had finished my PhD and was teaching summer school at the University of Iowa. My life and my career were beginning to take shape.

Then I received a phone call from a man who identified himself as Roy Doxey, president of the Eastern States Mission. He simply said, “Brother Hansen, we are expecting you to come and revive the pageant this year.”

“That isn’t possible,” I replied. “I can’t possibly come back. I have a full teaching load.”

“Well, you’ll have to do it,” he said.

“Why don’t you get Brother Karl Wood?”¹ I suggested. I was a little bit shocked when he said that he had already tried to get Brother Wood.

I explained that I had just signed my first contract, and I was not popular with the department chairman, E. C. Mabie, because of the stand I had taken regarding the Sabbath. At Iowa it was customary to have the major dress rehearsal on Sunday. I had said at the beginning, “I cannot do it, Mr. Mabie. My church meets in Cedar Rapids.” Cedar Rapids was the closest branch, and we took the electric train on Sunday morning. All of the meetings were bunched in the morning, and then we would return home in the afternoon. So E. C. Mabie and I had reached an agreement: I would go to my meetings in the morning, and he would see that dress rehearsals started in midafternoon. From then on, Mr. Mabie called me “preacher.”

At any rate, I had no intention of tackling Mr. Mabie about leaving campus during my first term of teaching to go to Palmyra for the pageant. President Doxey suggested that we meet in the mission office in Philadelphia. The office had been moved there from New York City.

Again I said, “I can’t do it. It’s too far to come and still keep my schedule here.” He indicated that he would call again tomorrow. He called the next day and said, “The Brethren have given me permission to meet you in the mission home in Chicago. Will you come there and meet me over the weekend?”

I agreed but told him, “It will be lost time. You must not get your hopes up.”

So I took the train to Chicago and met him. He was very persuasive. He frankly surprised me with the keen understanding he had of the pageant and its value. He tried very hard to understand my problems and to get me to understand what was in his mind. He was not abrasive or rigid, but I finally had to tell him again that, with Mr. Mabie’s attitude, I thought it was impossible. At that he seemed almost
exhausted but asked, “Do I have your permission to call him?”

I responded, “Yes, but don’t be surprised at anything he says.”

I returned to Iowa City and was in my classroom teaching Monday morning when one of the secretaries came from the main office with the message that “the Boss” wanted to see me after class. (We all called Mr. Mabie “the Boss.”) So I went to see him, and I admit I went with some fear and trembling. A trip to the Boss’s office was much like a trip to the woodshed at home. It is humorous now because I know him in a very different way, but then I was concerned. I knew why I was meeting with him, but I didn’t know what to expect from him.

I went in. He invited me to sit down and asked, “Now what’s this stuff about a religious pageant in western New York?”

I tried to explain the best I could what the pageant was and its relationship to the church. He looked at me a second and said, “Well, don’t you think you’d better go do it?”

I was so shocked that all I could get out was, “But Mr. Mabie, my classes. What’ll I do?”

Without hesitation, he resolved the problem. “We will cover your classes until you’re through and come back.” He continued, “You know, when I think of the way we have moved Sunday rehearsals so you can go to church . . . What’s the matter? Your church is asking you to do something. How can you refuse when I’m making it possible?”

I didn’t have a single defense—not a single defense. I was done. So I made the arrangements as to when I would leave and when I would return.

I went to the hill to revive the pageant but found that it was to be a bigger job than I had thought. I was fortunate to have President Doxey’s help and cooperation in putting things back together. Everything had disappeared as far as physical property was concerned. We found parts of the stages built into the walls of chicken coops. Some costumes and props had just been thrown away to make the storage space available for things that seemed more important at the time.

President Doxey appointed a very mature elder, Elder Dwight Dixon, as the work crew director. (Years later Dr. Dwight Dixon, a physicist, joined the faculty at Brigham Young University.) A marvelous group of 18 elders, who were strong physically and spiritually, were also appointed to the work crew.

The crew had moved into a terrible old broken-down farmhouse, known as the “old Bennett farm,” at the south end of the hill by the time I arrived. They had put it together as best they could to live in that year. Elder Dixon, in his report, described the shower that they installed:

A shower was constructed by placing three oil drums near the well with a pit under them in which a fire was built each evening to heat the water. A hose was used to fill the drums and conduct the water to the shower below the old shed. This arrangement was satisfactory excepting that the drums should be mounted a few feet higher so that the pressure at the shower house will be a little greater.

When I arrived in Palmyra, Elder Dixon picked me up and brought me to the farmhouse. As we stopped in front, he said, “I don’t think you’ll mind living here. It’s really not too bad.”

Trying not to hurt any feelings, I said, “Oh, I’m sure it will be fine.”

Elder Dixon’s sense of humor wouldn’t let him stop at that. As he took my old, beat-up luggage out of the car, he couldn’t resist adding, “It matches your luggage perfectly.” (To top it all off, as I left pageant that year, the work crew gave me a new set of luggage that they had all chipped in to buy for me.)

After I moved in with the crew and we began to talk about the pageant, one realization struck me: I was the only one who had ever seen the pageant. None of the crew had seen it. All they knew about what should be done they had gotten from the 1941 work crew’s report.

Elder Dixon and the crew began to rebuild the three basic stages on the hill. The first was near the bottom and was 12 feet deep and 40 feet wide. The second was located farther up the hill, and the third was about three-fourths of the way up the hill. These upper stages were about 10 feet deep by 30 feet wide.

I began to worry about sight lines. The crowds in the past had overflowed our efforts to seat them. Many brought their own chairs and put them at the ends of the rows of seats. So in order to improve the sight lines for those people, we took out about a dozen trees and widened the staging area.

Another challenge was acquiring costumes for the pageant. The costumes that had been borrowed
in Logan, Utah, had been returned, and many of the costumes that had been created for the earlier pageant had been thrown away. So I reestablished contact with Ann Neddo of the Logan Pageant Society and arranged to rent the costumes we had previously used.

As in past years, for lighting we turned to Harris Cooper, owner of Cooper Lighting and Decorating, Syracuse, New York. Elder Dixon had negotiated the rental of the dimmers and lighting equipment from him. The lighting instruments that the mission had purchased remained but had rusted from the humidity. Harris considered them obsolete, but Elder Quinton Klingler, who had been assigned to assist Harris with the lighting, was able to fix all of them for use in the pageant. The routine of stringing the cable and hanging and focusing the lighting instruments was somewhat delayed because Harris's equipment was being used in another production and didn't arrive at the hill until four days before the pageant was presented.

Elder Dixon found the old sound system at the Martin Harris Farm and moved it out to the hill, but it wouldn't work. Elder Burns Black, who had been a radioman in the navy, finally got it working. But just before the performances it quit again, and we had to rent an amplifier. It still didn't work all that well. The whole system was too small and frequently overdriven, which caused the sound to be distorted.

As the balance of the missionaries arrived, I began work with the cast. The usual casting procedure brought back an old problem: trumpeters opened and closed the pageant—were there four missionaries who could play the trumpet strong enough to be heard? Indeed there were: Elders Allen Cook, Kelsey Chatfield, Kjar Willey, and Harold King. The Lord continued to call elders with the skill to play the trumpet each year until the pageant was finally recorded.

One of the big visual changes we made in 1948 was in the façades that covered the newly constructed light towers. These two towers were 10 feet by 14 feet at the base and were 20 feet tall. They were constructed on concrete-block bases. Betty, my wife, designed and helped construct and paint these huge façades. The top of each façade stepped down, and there was a three-dimensional Aztec head about two-thirds of the way up. The work crew constructed a scaffolding from which the heads could be mounted and painted. The façades were very imposing, and the trees that had been planted on the hill much earlier still had not grown to any great height. The façades not only masked the light towers but helped to mask the offstage areas as well.

The crew acquired two army surplus tents to store tools and materials in during the construction period. Then during dress rehearsal and performance days, these tents were converted into dressing rooms. The smaller, 16’ x 16’ tent was set up just north and east of the sound booth for use as the women’s dressing room. The larger, 16’ x 32’ tent was set up on the other side of the acting area just south of the south tower and used as the men’s dressing room. This was a great improvement but was still very primitive.

With the technical aspects of the pageant moving along well and the cast in rehearsal, the crew turned its attention to providing seating for the audience. They borrowed 650 planks (16-foot two-by-tens and two-by-twelves) from lumberyards in Palmyra, Pittsford, and Canandaigua. The crew built special two-by-four end supports. Holes were dug with grubbing hoes to hold the supports, and then a short length of pole was driven into the ground for the middle support. The crew felt that this would provide seating for about 7,000 people, even though the press releases announced that we had seating for 10,000.

All of the parking was planned for the east side of the highway. Two entrances were provided: one near the concrete culvert and the other farther south across from the farm. For overflow, a road to the south pasture was laid out.

Elder Clifford Young, then an Assistant to the Twelve, attended the mission conference and the pageant. He was very interested in what we were doing. Both he and his wife were writers, which gave them a feeling for some of the frustrations I was having with the script.

As the pageant closed, the press reported that over 80,000 audience members had seen it during the three nights. I didn’t have much time to savor the spirit that was always there. I returned immediately to my classes at the University of Iowa and finished my summer contract. In the fall I went back to my position at Utah State Agricultural College, but the pageant was never far away from my thoughts. President Doxey and I corresponded most of the winter on different matters concerning the next year’s pageant. One of the matters was the construction of more suitable living quarters for the
work crew. A 20’ x 50’ building to be constructed on the back side of the hill was agreed upon and constructed before preparation for the pageant began. It was designed to provide sleeping quarters, kitchen and restroom facilities for the work crew during pageant time, and storage for pageant materials during the remainder of the year. It began as the “pageant house” but, of course, has had some remodeling and has been known by other names over the years. During the latter years, it became known as the “cook shack” since it was used as a kitchen and dining room for the work crew.

The 1949 pageant was scheduled for August 18–20, and George Q. Morris had been appointed to replace Roy W. Doxey as mission president. Even with a change in president, things began much the same. I had a few ideas from the year before that I wanted to introduce into the pageant. I had wanted almost from the beginning to bring Joseph Smith as a character into the pageant as a unifying element. The need for changes that would aid audience understanding of the story and the message of the pageant had been discussed. I felt that by using Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni as narrator-characters, I could both clarify the story and strengthen the message.

After I arrived at the hill in 1949, I asked the work crew to make some visual changes. We used the same basic stage arrangements as before, but I had them add a 12’ x 12’ section to the first stage and a 10’ x 16’ section to the third stage. In enlarging the acting area of the third stage, it was also necessary to change the backing units. I decided to remove the large pyramid as a backing unit and replace it with a disc similar in design but larger than the other discs behind the third stage. The wall behind the first stage also had to be extended toward the audience. With this extension to the first stage, I also widened the opening some 45 feet.

I had felt a need for a visual focus during the crucifixion scene, but I didn’t want to depict the scene with people on the crosses. It seemed wrong to me. So I had three wooden crosses erected near the top of the hill. These crosses were very rustic and were lit during the scene to provide visual focus while the music built the climax.

Although we had talked the year before about buying our own lighting equipment so we could do the lighting ourselves, we didn’t receive enough budget to do it right. So it seemed wise to hire Harris Cooper as we had done in previous years. I was worried as always by the small amount of time Harris spent at the hill. I tried as best I could to work out a lot of the details by letter before he arrived. It helped some, but he still flew from Syracuse, New York, to rehearse lights nearly all night. Although not a member of the church, he was most cooperative in supplying the latest lighting equipment and technical know-how to light the pageant in a very professional manner.

That year, Bishop Thorpe B. Isaacson, second counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, arrived at the hill while preparations were underway. He came out on the hill and began to talk with me about the pageant. He seemed genuinely interested. It made me feel marvelous. So when he asked, “Are there things that I can help you with?” I felt he was sincere.

I said, “Well, Bishop Isaacson, look around you. I’m absolutely ashamed of the buildings. Some of these old buildings don’t even have any paint on them.”
When the pageant was in performance and the lights were aimed only on what we wanted to be seen, things didn’t look too bad. But in the daylight hours when people were able to see everything, the surrounding area looked shabby and run-down.

I went on, “We really don’t have any paint to put on some of these stages, and I don’t have any budget to buy it with.”

“What do you need most?” he asked.

“A lot of green paint,” I answered.

With that he got in his car and went into Palmyra himself. He came back with gallons of green paint. We immediately started to apply it to everything that didn’t move and some things that did. When we finished, I at least wasn’t as ashamed of our surroundings as I had been.

It was fortunate that these things were done, because for the first time in the pageant’s history, an actual performance (on Thursday, August 18) was televised and broadcast by WHAM-TV from Rochester. The mission shared the cost with the TV station, and the broadcast won us a lot of attention that year.

Bishop Isaacson stayed for the presentation of the pageant. In his talk at the October general conference of that year (1949), he spoke of the pageant, which was a marvelous lift for me because there had not been much official church notice of the pageant before that. Several things had touched Bishop Isaacson, and he mentioned them in his talk. He was impressed with the faith of the missionaries:

At nine-ten every night those missionaries were asked to assemble at a certain wooded spot on Hill Cumorah, behind one of the large scenes, in the darkness. There was that great audience out in front, not knowing what was going on, but there those missionaries . . . huddled together, praying to the Lord that he would bless that pageant, that it would go forward without any interruption and that the audience would partake of the spirit of the pageant.

I remember the first night it started to rain about six o’clock. There was some concern whether or not it would prevent presentation of the pageant. It is all outdoors: the stage, the audience, and the scenes. I remember shaking hands with two fine young missionaries who had their pageant costumes on, and I said to them, as I shook hands with them, “I hope the rain will not spoil the pageant.”

One of them looked me straight in the eye and he said, “Oh, Bishop, don’t worry, the rain will not spoil the pageant. Nothing will spoil the pageant, because the elders of this mission have united our faith and called upon the Lord to bless this pageant that the message would go forward to the thousands of people who assemble to witness it.”

Now some may call that simple faith, but I call that most beautiful, most humble faith. By the time the pageant was ready to start, the storm had ceased and the stars were out bright.²

He also commented on another experience the missionaries had told him about:

The last night the [sound] technician became very much concerned that the loud-speaking system might not continue to operate, and he told the missionaries (assisting him) he did not know what to do. There was that great audience of thousands of people. They could not follow the pageant without the loud-speaking system functioning, because some of the audience were a block away from the Hill and from the scenes. But as he became more concerned, all he would have needed to do was to ask those missionaries, but he did not do that, so they took it in their own hands. They went out behind that truck in the wooded section of Hill Cumorah, and as we would expect, those missionaries knelt down and prayed that the Lord would see to it that the loud-speaking system would continue, and the loud-speaking system did continue until the pageant was over.

That kind of faith is the kind of faith that we have been hearing about the last few days here. That is the kind of faith that draws men close to God, their Eternal Father.³

He concluded that when the 30,000 people who were watching saw the trumpeters turn toward the statue of Moroni and play “An Angel from on High,” they couldn’t have helped being touched. He then said something that I have heard repeated over and over during the years I was at Cumorah: “It was one of the most thrilling yet touching experiences of my life.”

I had not been aware until later that the First Presidency had asked Bishop Isaacson to go to Palmyra and “determine whether or not it [the pageant]
should continue.” Bishop Isaacson reported to the First Presidency that the pageant should be “continued, expanded, increased and improved.”

It was then that the annual presentation was again established, and it moved from an Eastern States Mission activity to a church-recognized production. I was very pleased that what we were doing was found to be acceptable by the Brethren.

I returned to Logan and my position at Utah State. I hadn’t been home two weeks when we had the dates set for the 1950 pageant. I needed permission from the college to be absent during the period that I was to be gone to the pageant. I approached Franklin S. Harris, who was president at that time, for permission to go to Palmyra to direct the pageant. He responded on January 4, 1950, with the following:

As I have said to you personally, I believe that this is a very fine assignment, and we all congratulate you on it. We shall be glad to give you leave during this period. This is becoming a national and even an international affair. Your fine work is in large measure responsible for the excellence of the performance. We are very proud of you.

After I received this permission, a change occurred in the presidency of the college. I felt the need to go back again, and I received the same permission from the new president, Louis L. Madsen.

That year I tried a new idea in casting the voices that worked and saved precious time at the hill. A circular was sent out to all of the missionaries asking those who were interested in being the voice for one of the roles to record one of several passages of scripture and send it to me in Logan. By listening to the recordings, I was able to pick the voices I would use on the microphone in the sound booth.

A problem that had been with us from the beginning was the echo from the barn on the farm across the road. In March, trees were planted in front of the barn. At the same time, the fields across the road from the Bureau of Information were cleared to make additional parking space. We had known for two years that we needed more parking but couldn’t get it in place until now.

Although we did some things early, a crisis occurred in 1950 that couldn’t have been avoided by anything we might have done before the pageant. As had been our tradition, we had arranged for the costumes from the Logan Pageant Society. Ann Neva took care of the packing and shipping in Logan. She always packed the costumes well and had them out in plenty of time. We had received notification that they had been sent, but they didn’t arrive. I grew concerned and inquired. She put out the normal traces, but the costumes couldn’t be found. No one could find them. I immediately made inquiries of the New York costume companies. Their prices were just out of reason. I was acquainted with members of the church in Philadelphia and contacted them to see if they could do any better with the national costume company there, but to no avail. The lowest quote we were able to get was $6,000, at a time when the entire pageant budget was little more than $3,000.

At noon on the Monday before the pageant’s Thursday opening, I sought out President George Q. Morris and presented my dilemma. His response was almost immediate: “Well, what is there to prevent us from making our own costumes?”

I responded, “That’s what we’ve wanted to do all along, but we don’t have enough time.”

In his calm wisdom, he went right to the heart of the matter. “You don’t have any costumes now. We just don’t have enough money to rent them. I don’t know how we can possibly find the ones that are lost.” He paused and then asked, “Is there a way to make them?”

“Well, say that we could. Where will we get the money for the material?” I asked.

After a few phone calls to Rochester, Canandaigua, and Newark, President Morris gave us permission to try it. By 1:00 p.m. that day, the lady missionaries, headed by Sister Ethel Horspool, who prior to her mission was a designer for Ogden Knitting Mills, were sent to buy material. We decided that all we could afford was cotton. They were told that the material should have stripes that run vertically and as colorful as possible.

You remember that the sisters went on their missions at a little older age then, and as I remember, there were one or two who were on short-term missions. As a consequence, we had several sisters who had trained in home economics and some who had experience as a result of employment. We were able to organize shifts of sisters with one or two of these sisters with more experience in charge.

A costume shop was created in the Bureau of Information garage and on the driveway in front of it. The work crew set up cutting and sewing tables
out of sawhorses and planks. The members and nonmembers in Palmyra, when told of our plight, brought their personal sewing machines. Others said, “Cut them out and pin them. We’ll sew them.” The impossible was under way.

The loss of the costumes and our valiant effort to beat the clock turned out to be a publicity director’s dream come true. The New York press jumped on this human interest story. Even Lowell Thomas, during his nationwide CBS radio newscast, gave a nightly report on how we were doing.

We worked six-hour shifts around the clock. Besides the costume crews, we also had a crew making hats, papier-mâché helmets, and Indian headdresses. While the missionary haircuts were right for modern American missionaries, they were wrong for Book of Mormon and Bible characters and had to be covered up. Some of the elders decided to sew the hems on their own costumes and did such a good job that they were put to work on the crews.

By Wednesday at 9:00 p.m., when the dress rehearsal was scheduled, we had sewn over 600 yards of material and completed over 200 costumes. The dress rehearsal began with only one costume piece missing. That was a hat for Alma the Younger.

Two blessings resulted from this emergency. First, I can’t remember having a cast that was closer and more diligent. Second, at last we had our own costumes for the pageant.

The day after the pageant opened, the lost costumes were discovered in Newark, New Jersey, having been sent there instead of Newark, New York, as they were addressed. They were returned to Logan.

Elder Herman Black was the head of the work crew and had recognized, as I had, that during rehearsals not all of the missionaries were involved all the time. Nothing had been very effective in putting that time to productive use except in 1948, when the missionaries were sent out to advertise the pageant. Elder Black organized gospel discussions led by mission leaders, scripture study, and periods for construction of visual aids. He also scheduled programs in neighboring communities where the musical skills and talents of the missionaries were presented. These activities put the time of the missionaries to more productive use and became a very natural part of the pageant experience, along with the testimony meetings in the Sacred Grove.

In 1951 the Korean War had reduced the number of missionaries in the field. Rumors began circulating that the pageant wouldn’t be held. But President David O. McKay had just been sustained as president of the church, on April 4, 1951, at the death of President George Albert Smith. President McKay had earlier become a close friend of the pageant and was one of its staunchest supporters. He quickly dispelled these rumors in his statements for the press:

We can easily overcome the missionary problem, but there are other features about the Pageant I intend to discuss with my associates before we can make a final announcement on whether it will continue each year.

There is nothing amateurish about it [the pageant]. It was a professional production and a great deal of credit is due Dr. Harold I. Hansen of the Utah State Agricultural College, who directed the presentation, and to the missionaries who took part.

President McKay’s reference to “features” he intended to discuss pointed to the inadequacy of the facilities at the pageant to serve the large crowds.

Pageant director Harold Hansen inspects costumes in Brigham Young University’s theatre department.
The water supply had been exhausted. Many of the visitors could not find accommodations. The press reported that over 30 carloads of visitors were forced to spend the night in their cars on the pageant grounds. The traffic was too much for the existing highway and parking. The audience for the three nights had exceeded 90,000, and Sheriff Thompson from Ontario County indicated that hundreds of cars had to be turned away on the final two nights.

While these problems were real, they had to be solved outside of the pageant organization. Inside the pageant we had some of the same problems that had plagued us almost from the beginning. We tried again to solve the problem of the sound. We were able to get permission to obtain a whole new sound system, one similar to that of a radio studio. It had three turntables with 12-inch arms; a control console with all of the channels, preamps, mixers, and so forth; and power amps that would drive 10 speakers. This new equipment, which was set up by Elder D. R. Hale, helped the quality of the sound a lot, but it wasn't long until we knew we still didn't have the problem solved.

We used the costumes we had constructed the year before. We did build a few more for the lead characters that needed more than we had been able to give the year before. They included King Noah and King Lamoni.

The lighting was the same as before. Harris Cooper supplied the bulk of the lighting equipment. While Elder Merrill L. Bennion supervised a major part of the work, Harris was there to do the final touches and rehearse the cues. He was a young Jewish man and a perfectionist. There were over 100 dimmer cues, and the follow spots (manually operated spotlights that follow a performer onstage) had their own list of cues as well. The follow spots had a peculiar habit of freezing up at the most inopportune times. They would be working perfectly one moment and then freeze the next. I remember that when one such moment occurred, Harris shouted at the operator. The elder leaned over the edge of the tower and explained that it had frozen again. Harris told him how to fix it, and then turned to me and said, “I feel so awful. I just shouted at him. I have never worked with so many young people who have given themselves so completely as they do, and then I shout at them. Why did I shout?”

I told him, “Just because you’re human, Harris.” One of the most marvelous stories that occurred during those years happened with Harris. The full-time elders who had been assigned to work with Harris on lights began to discuss gospel questions while they were working. They got to quoting scriptures to make their points. Harris was the type of person that caused you to forget completely that he was not a member of the church. His speech was clean, he was very open, and so forth. Well, the elders started to discuss Hebraic Israel. The direction the discussion was going disturbed me because Harris was Jewish, as was his family. They were actively practicing their religion. I was very upset because I felt that the discussion could destroy the relationship that I had with this very fine man. But the elders, completely oblivious of Harris, were going right on with their discussion. One elder started to say something that was not as it should have been, and I interrupted him by saying, “Elder, you’re hurting me terribly. You’re forgetting that I have a Jewish grandmother.”

That ended the discussion, but I soon started hearing right and left, “Did you know Elder Hansen has a Jewish grandmother?” But it didn’t end there. Harris brought his whole family to the pageant and, in introducing me to his mother, said, “Mother, do you realize that Elder Hansen has a Jewish grandmother?”

I quickly said, “Well, it’s not quite like that, Mrs. Cooper. I remember hearing that the furthest relative is at most a 32nd cousin. So I feel safe in saying that I have a Jewish grandmother.”

The Jewish grandmother rumor followed me for about 20 years. But at least it took care of the problem at the time, and I avoided offending a valued friend.

President McKay, as he had always been, was an inspiration to all of us connected to the pageant.
His wise counsel had saved us on several occasions. About this time, the pageant gained another friend in Elder Richard L. Evans. One of the first things that I had to arrange through him was the dates for the 1952 pageant. I received a letter dated December 18, 1951, from President George Q. Morris in which he agreed that we had a problem with the pageant dates of August 14–16 because of their being so close to the August 19 opening of the local fair. There was a feeling that the limited accommodations would be overtaxed by both events. So I went to discuss it with Elder Evans in Salt Lake City, and he agreed that we should move the dates to August 7–9. We called President Bryant Rossiter of the Rochester New York Stake, and he agreed to the change. But Elder Evans was quick to add, “Nothing of this can get out yet. I must check with President McKay.”

I challenged his need to check with President McKay by saying, “President McKay won’t know when the pageant is.”

“That’s true,” he answered, “but when it comes out that it’s been changed, I’ll be in his office explaining why it was changed and why he wasn’t told.”

He then started to try to find a way to get some time with President McKay. Elder Evans indicated that he knew the president was about to go to California for a rest, and he tried to get to him on the phone. He got President McKay’s secretary, whom we all lovingly called the “Iron Curtain” because you couldn’t get past her. He didn’t get through, nor could he find out when President McKay was leaving. So he called President McKay’s son, who said, “If you find out, please let us know. We can’t find out either.”

With this, he sent me to meet Betty and the girls, who were waiting for me in the lobby of the Hotel Utah. He said as I left, “I’ll keep trying to find a way, but if all else fails, I’ll call him after he gets to California. I hate to, but I’ll do it if necessary.”

As I reached the lobby, there was President McKay shaking hands with my two daughters. He didn’t know who they were. It was the man’s disposition and nature. He saw those two young girls, and when they smiled at him, he went over and shook their hands.

I rushed back to Elder Evans and told him, “If you ever want to see President McKay, just let me know.”

“What’s this?” he asked.

I answered, “He’s coming out of the hotel now.”

He got up and said on his way out, “I’ll go down and meet him.”

We laughed a number of times about how, if he wanted to see the president, he should let me know. I could arrange it. That started a relationship that was a blessing in so many ways for me. Elder Evans was very conscious of the pageant’s material needs as well as spiritual needs. He was interested in the housing conditions. Where were participants living? Whom were they staying with? How were they eating? What were the participants doing while another group was rehearsing? There were occasions when time was wasted. All of these things were meaningful to him and seemed to come to his mind, even during the period between pageants. I would suddenly get a phone call from him because he had thought of this or that and wanted to know what I thought. I was able to present ideas to him, and there were many that he could approve immediately. If he thought it to be a viable idea, he would endorse it.

After he had been called to the Quorum of the Twelve, he told me that we would have Elder Mark E. Petersen working with us too. I was overjoyed at the prospect of working with two such tremendous individuals who had such a gentleness, compassion, and love toward people. I always felt their deep sense of appreciation for what I was doing. They couldn’t help enough. The help always came in a very positive way. Working with those two brethren was a sheer joy.
“Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder”

Music inspired by The Hill Cumorah

Roger L. Miller
And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. —Revelation 14:6

Whether it be the music of a lovely spring morning ringing through a nearby grove or the gilded statue of Moroni trumpeting the everlasting gospel to all the world, as in St. John’s revelation, music, it seems, is never far from “Cumorah’s lonely hill.”¹ A surprisingly varied body of musical works inspired by the hill’s prophetic history, ranging from Parley P. Pratt’s well-known “An Angel from on High”² to the music of the famous Hill Cumorah pageant “America’s Witness for Christ,”³ attests to the dramatic and emotional appeal of this great landmark of Mormonism.⁴
Recently, several Latter-day Saint composers were invited to submit keyboard compositions for a recording project conceived around the general theme “Pictures at a Mormon Exhibition.” For his part, pianist Reid Nibley chose an 1893 painting, *Hill Cumorah,* by Alfred Lambourne. The Lambourne painting, Nibley explains, gives me pretty much the same feeling as my piano piece—tempestuous movement, harmonic colors shifting from dark to light and sudden changes in dynamics. There are unlimited possibilities for a story to go with the painting and music but the very name “Cumorah” opens our imagination to the incredible events that occurred there.⁶

The painting, which is prominently displayed in a central hallway of the Salt Lake Temple, is not only a brilliant and compelling witness to the power of art in the service of faith but also a bold piece of religious symbolism. The time appears to be early fall, perhaps late September. Faded meadow grass carpets the ground beneath trees and bushes in various stages of muted autumn color. Stark and lonely, the gray summit thrusts upward, dividing its sky into fields of blue-white radiance and troubled, sinister darkness. On one side, light appears to burst from the hillside; on the other, a violent storm threatens as jagged streaks of lightning pierce the roiling clouds. No human object interrupts the awesome landscape, except for telling glimpses of a rail fence virtually buried and unnoticed in the sublime vision.⁷ Beneath its anxious exterior, what would seem to be a modernist nature painting is nothing less than a metaphorical drama of the restoration of the gospel, with Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni barely out of view. Extensions of the metaphor come easily to mind: the ominous shadow of two fratricidal battles fought either here or at some faraway namesake of this place, the precious plates and the heavy loneliness of the man who bore them here, and the ancient stick of Joseph speaking to our day as “a voice from the dust.”

Theodore E. Curtis’s “Hail Cumorah, Silent Wonder,” a verbal analogue to Lambourne’s painting, seems to have captured the intense drama as well as the quiet majesty of this sacred place:

Hail Cumorah, silent wonder
Of the hidden ages gone,
Lo, the footprints of the thunder

Bares your treasure to the dawn,
And Moroni clothed in glory,
Crows your visage as of old,
To reveal the ancient story
Written on your heart of gold.
 Twice a people’s last protection,
Twice a witness of the world
In the arms of insurrection,
To prophetic ruin hurled.
Ramah,⁹ of the ancient nation,
Dawns thy glorious day at last.
From your bosom comes salvation
And the story of the past.

The first stanza envisions the Hill Cumorah as we know it today, with Moroni’s handsome statue crowning its crest, while the second stanza neatly summarizes Book of Mormon history. Not surprisingly, the poem’s vivid imagery has attracted several musical settings. Hugh Dougall’s setting, for example, was included in the 1927 hymnal. This linkage between visual art, refined poetic word, and music underlies this survey of music inspired by Cumorah, a survey that is at once brief, tantalizing, and brimming with optimism about our musical future.

**HYMNS AND THE HILL CUMORAH**

Recently, Karen Lynn Davidson traced “the influence of the Book of Mormon through more than a century and a half of Mormon hymnody” (from Emma Smith’s 1835 *Collection of Sacred Hymns* to the 1985 *Hymns*).¹⁰ By Davidson’s criteria only 19 hymns published in the official hymnals of the church could be uniquely tied to the Book of Mormon. Even fewer mentioned the Hill Cumorah directly: “An Angel Came Down from the Mansions of Glory,” by William W. Phelps;¹¹ “I Have No Home. Where Shall I Go?” by Lucy Smith;¹² “An Angel from On High,” by Parley P. Pratt, and two of his lesser known hymns, “Hark! ye mortals. Hist! be still”¹³ and “When Earth in Bondage Long Had Lain.”¹⁴ First published in the unofficial hymnal known as Little and Gardner (1844),¹⁵ the last hymn’s 10 original stanzas attempt a summary of the entire restored gospel, with perhaps the earliest use of Pratt’s familiar phrase “Cumorah’s lonely hill” in the third stanza (see accompanying sidebar). Lucy Smith’s extensive narrative on the post-destruction tribulations of Moroni is likewise
An angel came down from the mansions of glory,
And told that a record was hid in Cumorah,
Containing our Saviour's most glorious Gospel,—
And also the cov'nant to gather His people.

A heavenly treasure, a book full of merit,
It speaks from the dust by the power of the Spirit;
A voice from the Saviour that Saints can rely on,
To watch for the day when He brings again Zion.

O listen ye isles, and give ear, ev'ry nation.
For great things await you in this generation,
The kingdom of Jesus in Zion shall flourish,
The righteous will gather, the wicked must perish.
O Israel! O Israel! In all your abidings,
Prepare for your Lord, when you hear these glad tidings.

While hymns of this sort were well received in the church's first century, Davidson's study suggested a current need for more "devotional hymns of timeless and universal dignity, personal meditations upon Book of Mormon texts, hymns that pour forth the gratitude and testimony of the writer, inviting the congregation to do the same." A similar plea was made by Elder Boyd K. Packer in 1976:

Our hymns speak the truth as far as they go. They could speak more of it if we had more of...
them, specifically teaching the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. If I had my way there would be many new hymns with lyrics near scriptural in their power, bonded to music that would inspire people to worship. Think how much we could be helped by another inspired anthem or hymn of the Restoration.¹⁹

Retired Brigham Young University religion professor Rodney Turner’s “What Do We Hear from Cumorah?” (with music by Janice Kapp Perry)²⁰ attempts exactly that. His text adapts the rhetorical format of Joseph Smith’s 1842 doctrinal “epistle” (Doctrine and Covenants 128), written from Nauvoo to encourage and energize the Saints during this difficult period:

And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed.²¹

Formulated as a concise refrain, the hymn’s title begins each of its three stanzas:

What do we hear from Cumorah?
From its heights holy prophets of old
Witness with power and plainness
Of Jesus, on plates of gold.
Their message is truth everlasting,
The truth that shall save each soul
Who, hearing the call of the Shepherd,
Repents and seeks rest in His fold.

What do we hear from Cumorah?
From its heart humble servants proclaim
Men are alike unto heaven,
As children of God, the same.
Restored is the gospel of gladness,
With joy we can now exclaim
“The burden of sin has been lifted
Because of our faith in Christ’s name.”

What do we hear from Cumorah?
From on high speaks the voice of the Son
Off’ring to all life eternal
Through Him who denieth none.
With Joseph’s word joined unto Judah,
Their witnesses stand as one,
The gospel goes forth to the nations
The work of salvation begun!

There is much to admire in Turner’s rhetorical concept, even with its minor problems. Especially noteworthy is the three-part sequence: “From its heights” (repentance), “From its heart” (forgiveness), and “From on high” (salvation and eternal life).

Nowhere is the doctrine of salvation through Christ more succinctly stated than in Moroni’s final address to the Gentiles, written shortly before the plates were buried:

Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him,
and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and
if ye shall . . . love God with all your might,
mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient
for you, that . . . ye may be perfect in Christ.
(Moroni 10:32)

A frequent source of texts, this eloquent passage with its concise invitation to “Come unto Christ” has inspired a number of works of that title, including Reid Nibley’s recent anthem “Come unto Christ,” for chorus and organ (2000).²² Closely related are the many works based on the recurrent “voice from the dust” metaphor, with its direct connection to Cumorah, as in Moroni 10:27:

And I exhort you to remember these things;
for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know
that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of
God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did
I not declare my words unto you, which were
written by this man, like as one crying from the
dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?²³

Among the several interesting works on this theme, Henry Evans Giles’s anthem “The Truth Has Spoken from the Dust” was composed for the 100th anniversary of Joseph Smith’s receiving the plates from the angel Moroni, which was observed with programs and ceremonies throughout the church.²⁴ President Heber J. Grant marked the occasion with a visit to the Hill Cumorah on 22 September 1927. Wards and stakes held commemorative services the following Sunday, 25 September, and a special program arranged by Tabernacle organist Edward P. Kimball aired that evening on KSL radio.²⁵ Giles’s anthem (composed for the Ensign Stake) contains four divisions—Chorus, Chant, Chorale, Finale—and bears the ceremonial trappings of a British coronation anthem, opening with a fugal song of praise and concluding with a brief “Amen” chorus. Only the second section (Chant) refers specifically
to the work’s title, with an explicit nod to Moroni’s symbolic trumpet:

The truth has spoken from the dust
And righteousness from heav’n come forth;
The fullness of the everlasting Gospel
Shall now resound through all the earth.
Give ear unto the Angel’s call.
His trumpet sounding long and loud.
Ye nations, kindreds, tongues, and empires all
Prepare to meet the Lord, your God.

A more recent treatment of this theme, Merrill Bradshaw’s avant-garde “A Voice from the Dust”²⁶ (composed in 1978 for a cappella choir), could hardly have been more different. At first glance, its text—a gloss on Isaiah 29, treating the future redemption of Jerusalem—seems to harbor only distant echoes of Cumorah. A closer reading, however, reveals that the real theme is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and restoration of the gospel in the last days:

Jerusalem, thou holy city far above value
Have no more heaviness and sorrow
For the word of the Lord cometh to thee from a far land
Whispering low out of the dust
With a familiar spirit out of the ground.  
(Isaiah 29:1–6)

Dream no more of food! Eat!
Eat what the Lord sendeth that thy soul be not empty.
Think no more of thirst! Drink!
Drink of the waters of life that ye be filled,
For the Lord doeth a marvelous work and a wonder.  
(Isaiah 29:8, 13–14)

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
Hear the words of the book from the dust! (Isaiah 29:11–12)
Israel! Israel!
See his great work made without hands!
(Daniel 2:34)

Jerusalem!
The Lord speaketh, who shall not hear?
The Lord sendeth, who shall not receive?
The Lord worketh, who shall not be astonished?  
(Isaiah 29:18–24)

Rejoice! O Israel!
Jerusalem, Thy salvation is nigh.

A number of avant-garde techniques support the poetic imagery. For example, the syllables JE-RU-SA-LEM, which begin the piece, are intoned by “slow, intense” tone clusters underscored by vocal sonorities of indistinct pitch and shape, creating a deliberate feeling of remoteness and estrangement. Inchoate whispers (“whispering low out of the dust”) gradually form coherent words, finally emerging as full-voiced, pitched sounds at the text “out of the ground.” After a bout of “frenzied” counterpoint, all the voices climax in unison, shouting, “Rejoice, O Israel! Rejoice, O Israel!” before coming full circle to the sounds of the opening on the text, “Jerusalem, Thy salvation is nigh.” In a related piece, “The Vision of Ezekiel”²⁷ (composed for the BYU A Cappella Choir and the Israel Chamber Orchestra), Bradshaw reverted to more traditional musical language for his treatment of the stick of Joseph and stick of Judah theme. Again, the connection to Cumorah might seem tangential, until we realize that Ezekiel 37:16–27 is the key to the unrelenting importance that Book of Mormon writers attach to the Old Testament patriarch Joseph, who by name and covenant links the ancient patriarchal order with the remnant of the house of Israel through a modern Joseph at Cumorah.²⁸ It is hard to resist commenting on current BYU composer Christian Asplund’s several hundred innovative hymns, composed primarily as a personal expres-
sion. Some require a cultivated ear, but several are surprisingly accessible despite their modern propensities. “And now I, Moroni” (Ether 12:38–41)—a mildly dissonant choral recitative for male voices—is especially effective. A solemn loneliness infuses the chantlike chords, which in their expressive neutrality (static harmony and dynamics, minimal melodic motion) emphasize the pure power of Moroni’s testimony.²⁹ Imaginative works of this sort show how modernist and even avant-garde techniques can be effectively employed in dramatic and rhetorical contexts. It is generally assumed that audiences have not kept pace with the rhetoric of modern music, but if—as here—the context is clear and the purpose convincing, the effect can be exactly right.³⁰

**Dramatic Works**

The Book of Mormon presents many opportunities to go beyond tradition in the portrayal of what Davidson describes as its “stirring oratory, thought-provoking figures of speech and distinctive turns of phrase.”³¹ One could add to these its rich narrative, compelling adventures, and intense drama. Elder B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy was among the first to have a substantial vision of music and drama as a means of telling the Book of Mormon story.³² As a young journalist, he wrote stories about Moroni, sketched a “Nephite Republic,” and created “a fictionalized and heightened account of the life of Alma’s son Corianton,” later adapted as a play that “found its way from the Salt Lake Theater to Broadway.”³³ His purpose was to show that “Book of Mormon characters have flesh-and-blood counterparts in our own day and in our own interior lives.” In 1923, as president of the Eastern States Mission, Roberts “set up an elaborate celebration” to mark the 100th anniversary of Joseph Smith’s first encounter with the angel Moroni.³⁴ A dramatic oration that he prepared for the occasion was hailed by the press as “a sweeping vision with the power of a Nordic saga” and a “graphic panorama of the past”—perhaps the earliest intimation of what a Book of Mormon pageant might be. As the 1930 centennial of the church’s founding approached, Roberts “dreamed of a major motion picture with a script built upon one or more of the epic civilizations portrayed in the book.”³⁵ The movie was not to be, but in 1937 his dream was realized in an even more significant way, with the first performance of a gigantic outdoor drama on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah. For its first 20 years, the pageant relied on excerpts from works by Wagner and Tchaikovsky, but in 1957 an original musical score was performed and recorded by BYU choruses and the Utah Symphony Orchestra in the Salt Lake Tabernacle under the direction of the composer, Crawford Gates. Now, it is impossible for anyone who has seen “America’s Witness for Christ” not to think of Gates’s spectacular score resounding across the woods and farmlands of upstate New York.³⁶

Significantly, Elder Roberts’s ideas served as a kind of manifesto for a new generation of Latter-day Saint artists. One who seems to have taken his ideas seriously was BYU English professor Clinton F. Larson, whose poetic drama Coriantumr and its companion piece Moroni attracted much attention in the early 1960s.³⁷ These plays, according to the foreword³⁸ by Marden J. Clark, “mark a milestone in the use . . . of strictly Mormon, especially Book of Mormon, material” for serious dramatic purposes. “So far as I know,” Clark writes, “Mr. Larson is the first artist of any kind to exploit the tragic potential in the parallel destructions of the peoples of Jared and Nephi recorded in the Book of Mormon.” The “language is truly life-like . . . in its ability to suggest, to embody, even to create life in its depths, its totality, its ramifications, its emotional richness.”³⁹ Larson is able to skirt the didacticism that has plagued so much of Mormon literature while still making use of “the religious, moral, and ethical affirmations that are the heart of the Book of Mormon.” He treats both the Jaredite Coriantumr and the Nephite Moroni as tragic figures whose lives, because they are intertwined

Elder B. H. Roberts instructs local Latter-day Saint missionaries gathered at Hill Cumorah. Photo courtesy of Palmyra Bean Packer.
with nations of divine destiny, have transcendent, universal appeal. In Clark’s view the plays achieve universality by stressing not “undeserved suffering and evil,” but rather the “regenerative effects of suffering” through the atonement of Christ. Rarely, he says, have artistic mastery and spiritual power come together with such force as when, at the end of the second play, Moroni addresses the prophet Joseph from out of the past:

Joseph, I reach to you!
I reach to you from Sherrizah! He who was slain
By the Jews lived among us!
Joseph, we lived!
Ask if we have not lived!

My people, my people, let the Word raise you from the dead.⁴⁰

In the end Clark pleads not only for these plays to be performed but for more of their kind to be written:

Their very existence and publication challenges Church members to rise to a cultural level at which, if not these plays, then at least similarly honest attempts at real art from Mormon materials will get the kind of hearing they deserve.⁴¹

Such a challenge could not go unanswered. Fresh from a doctorate in composition at the University of Illinois, a young Merrill Bradshaw was just beginning his long and productive career at BYU when Larson’s plays were published. The two men became warm friends and intellectual comrades, sharing common aesthetic and spiritual perspectives about art in the church. A piano and vocal score found among Bradshaw’s papers at BYU may be his initial probe into Larson’s dramatic world. Entitled “Sarah’s Soliloquy,” it is a setting of the opening scene of Larson’s Coriantumr.⁴² In this play Larson’s elevated poetic prose examines the psychology of denial and despair that must have plagued the last days of the Jaredites (see Ether 12–15). As the play opens, the Jaredites have fought themselves almost to oblivion, and once again the separate factions (one led by Shiz, the other by Coriantumr) have gone out to senseless battle. The scene begins with Coriantumr’s wife, Sarah, holding an imaginary conversation with her son Mahonri. In her delusion, Sarah has convinced herself that Mahonri has not been involved in the fighting but is only just back from a day of hunting; in fact, he has joined the fighting and does not seem to be present as she speaks:

(Scene: Near the hill Ramah on the North American continent, in the fourth century before the birth of Christ. The time is late autumn. There is a cave to the right. In the center is a table; against the table rests a sword, upon which the light is particularly intense. In the posture of SARAH, who is alone, there is the hint of calamity.)

SARAH (Clearing the table)
Mahonri, your father will be here soon.
Sheath your sword; your work is done today.

(Absolutely)

There is enough food to last for many days;
Yet you bring more here to surfeit us,
And we eat or it spoils in the bright sun.

(Now humming)
Your sword, Mahonri—how could you hunt today? . . .

(Grasping reality)
What am I thinking of? Or was the sun but the glint
Of a jeweled scabbard somewhere near? . . .

(Looking, then fondling the cross of the sword)
Ah, the sacrifice of this time, that we are lonely,
Just a few in this expanse of light and heat,
Alone as the unbending trees. And we fight, run—
And fight again. The days of our traveling here, are heavy.

(CORIANTUMR enters with three soldiers, all breathing heavily. Their swords are streaked with blood.)⁴³

Sarah’s pensive and distracted mood changes are reflected in the disjunct contours of Bradshaw’s skillful counterpoint and in the piano’s mildly dissonant harmonies. Both musically and dramatically, he seems to have found an uncompromising—and
accessible—musical voice to match this challenging poetry. But the venture never gets beyond this first scene. Usually when a large artistic project grinds to a halt, it does so in midcourse, leaving a residue of notes, sketches, outlines, and so on, but not in this case; all that remains is this one promising score, and then—nothing. That Bradshaw went on to conclude many other lengthy and difficult projects suggests that this was a matter of choice. After all, a good poem has its own music, and Larson’s is powerful poetry. Perhaps this initial encounter was enough to convince him that he had nothing further to add. Did Bradshaw, as others, find Larson’s poetry too leaden, too grand for a musical setting? Or did he simply outgrow his early enthusiasm as his ideas matured in other directions?⁴⁴ The reasons are of little consequence, except that they indicate the difficulty any artist is likely to encounter in creating a serious work of this magnitude.

Even in a less ambitious project, there are difficulties. Newell Dayley’s Moroni (based on a script by Ralph G. Rodgers) was presented in the summer of 1977 in Salt Lake City’s Salt Palace under the supervision of Elder Mark E. Peterson of the Quorum of the Twelve.⁴⁵ Far removed from the epic poetry of Larson’s Moroni, Rodgers’s fictional narrative sets out to humanize the prophet-general Mormon and his house, as suggested in its preface:

Father Mormon is there, as is Moroni’s mother, his young friends, and even his romantic interests, and his enemies in war. . . . “Moroni” peels the gold leaf and bronze from this most fascinating character, and shows us a living, breathing human being—one who has the same concerns about family, about life and happiness as we do.⁴⁶

Its musical-theater format was intended to be both didactic and entertaining: Moroni, though not quite the stereotypical “bishop’s son,” has fallen for the wrong girl—a self-centered beauty queen—while the “girl next door” languishes unnoticed until, in a typical showtune duet (“When did love arrive?”), he awakens to himself through her and accepts his role in the world for what it really is. As the tragedy of the Nephite destruction plays out, Moroni finds himself alone with the sacred record, and the show ends with an epilogue picturing Joseph Smith and the resurrected angel Moroni on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah. Quintessential Mormon musical theater, Moroni was well received. But a work of this sort issues challenges unique to itself, challenges that have yet to be successfully met: Can characters of whom we know so little be endowed with flesh and blood without becoming caricatures? Can an entertainment medium such as musical theater, or even the more artistically serious medium of opera, create a believable context for the serious message of the Book of Mormon? Two projected works seek to answer yes.


The recently announced By the Hand of Mormon: Scenes from the Land of Promise hopes to achieve those very goals. A collaboration between highly experienced professionals—composer Sam Cardon, librettist David Piler, and artist Walter Rane—it promises to take the Book of Mormon musical to the level of a Broadway production. As in previous attempts, the goal is to make Book of Mormon figures come to life as real people, in their own environment, with something approximating authentic music, costuming, sets, and so on, with the hope that seeing into “their hearts and their lives can help point us to the Savior.”⁴⁷ Another dramatic work with direct ties to Cumorah is Crawford Gates’s recent opera Joseph! Joseph!, on the life of Joseph Smith. Covering the entire length and meaning of the Prophet’s life, Joseph! Joseph! also attempts a realistic portrait. It remains to be seen whether it is more challenging to re-create a well-documented historical person than to construct an artificial life for epic characters about whose personal life little is known. Both approaches hold out promise, but the challenge is to find the right combination of spiritual insight and artistic genius.⁴⁸
For what might seem obvious reasons, oratorio and similar types of unstaged musical drama have also held a strong appeal for Latter-day Saint composers. Leroy Robertson’s *Oratorio from the Book of Mormon* was the first major work of this kind. Its focus was the prophecies and ministry of Christ to the Nephites, as recorded in Helaman and 3 Nephi, and its success inspired other major Book of Mormon works. One of these was Rowan Taylor’s *Coriantumr* for four-part mixed chorus, soloists, and orchestra, which premiered in the East Los Angeles Stake Center in 1960. Like Larson’s play, the oratorio follows the evolution of the downfall of the Jaredites, as Coriantumr encounters the stratagems of his various nemeses in the region around ancient Ramah/Cumorah. Its text, taken directly from the book of Ether, relies on the inherent poetry of Mormon’s redaction, with its authentic structure, inflection, and cadence. With this effort, Taylor—a professor of composition at Pierce College in Los Angeles—demonstrated that uncompromising works of more than limited appeal can be drawn from Book of Mormon materials and that Latter-day Saint composers who want to write seriously can create opportunities of their own accord.

Darwin Wolford’s oratorio *The Land of Joseph,* on a libretto by Marylou Cunningham Shaver (commissioned by Ricks College in 1976 for the American bicentennial), portrays a sweeping vision of America’s religious history. The oratorio, which concludes with Moroni’s final words of warning at Cumorah, has the unifying theme that the “land of promise” can only be possessed by a righteous people. The narrow patriotic focus connecting the “land of promise” with the United States undoubtedly limits the potential of this work. More universally appealing is Wolford’s *Song from Cumorah,* a cantata for children’s chorus, with narration and lyrics by Mabel Jones Gabbott. The cantata unfolds around important Book of Mormon topics, each narration reinforced with a song, as in this example from the finale:

> “The stories we have told are in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon was translated from the plates which the angel Moroni took from the Hill Cumorah. Joseph Smith translated the record, which is *an account written by the hand of Mormon; wherefore it is an abridgement of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, and of the people of Jared—and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentiles to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.*’
> I heard the voices ringing
> In tones of mighty worth,
> From men whose words had waited
> Long hidden in the earth.
> When fools no longer hearken
> And cry that Christ is dead.
> Lo! Nephi tells his story;
> And Moroni’s word is read.
> I heard the voices singing,
> Of miracles, of prayer,
> Of Christ alive, but wounded,
> Of angels gathered there;
> When men again are seeking
> A hope against the night.
> His words will be their comfort,
> His love will make things right.

The delightful children’s series *Musical Adventures in the Book of Mormon* (formerly *The Wonderful Book of Gold*), by Melanie Hoffman and Marvin Payne, takes an entirely different approach to children and the Book of Mormon, replacing seriousness with whimsy. The characters, including three children and their dog, present the Book of Mormon in a way that is natural, accurate, and instructive to both children and adults. Set in the children’s treehouse, each of the 30 episodes is a skit beginning with dialogue, followed by a cleverly arranged song. “All the Folks on Nephi’s Boat,” for example, is a sea chantey, while the “Murmur Song” makes skillful use of irony and musical cliché to mock the futility and lack of faith evident in the constant bickering of Lehi’s rebellious family:

> Murmur in the morning. Murmur at night.
> Murmur to the left. Murmur to the right.
> They murmured up and down the desert sand:
> They murmured all the way to the—PROMised land.

The children ask questions and reason out solutions based on their own level of experience. Episodes are sequential, so the accounts of Mormon abridging the record and of Moroni burying the plates in the Hill Cumorah conclude the story of *The Wonderful Book of Gold.*
Steven Kapp Perry and Brad Wilcox’s *From Cumorah’s Hill*, written in a popular medium geared for young adults, works best as a cantata or concert piece. It was conceived around letters received by the composers addressing issues such as ridicule, intimidation and outright persecution, intellectual challenges, rebellious feelings and actions, and loneliness. Excerpts from the letters are paired with parallel situations in the Book of Mormon, thus providing practical and inspirational answers to the problems of ordinary people who want to live righteously but face overwhelming personal challenges.

“Voices from the Dust,” a (1990) stake production written by former KSL-TV news anchor Margaret Smoot, centered around the character Everyman (pretaped and projected onto jumbo television screens) and his search for truth. Interaction between the television character and an onstage family who have shared with him a copy of the Book of Mormon leads to portrayals—some humorous, some serious—of Book of Mormon episodes and doctrinal concepts, along with modern-day testimonials of its truth. Except for an original title song, the music is borrowed, ending with Jeff Goodrich’s “You Can Believe in Christ.” This unique application of television technology was but one way of enhancing an otherwise amateur production that proved both entertaining and inspiring. With today’s even more advanced technologies, the potential for this kind of creativity is virtually boundless.

**A Music Only Just Begun**

What began as a comprehensive survey of music inspired by the Hill Cumorah became, in process, a more introspective project, inevitably raising new questions: What constitutes the music of Cumorah? What are the themes associated with its ancient history, its place in the restoration and the early history of the church, its compelling role in the fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy, and its modern role in telling the church’s story? How have these various aspects inspired composers and influenced the arts in the church? What has been the response to the Hill Cumorah by the rank and file of the church, in its worship and in the deepening of individual and collective faith? Only gradually, it seems, have we come to realize how vast the possibilities are.

The church moved away from its geographical origins early in its history. Only a small percentage of early church members knew the prophet Joseph’s New York surroundings at first hand. Yet Cumorah was, and is, the symbolic heart of the restoration. It is a tangible connection with the Book of Mormon’s past—its prophets, its heroes, and its message to the world. As this very limited survey has shown, there is a wealth of musical potential in Cumorah’s history, but despite the variety and quality of works composed thus far, it is a potential largely untapped.

There is, however, reason for optimism. First, in terms of its cultural history, the church is still very young; we should remember that it took centuries for Christianity in general to build its impressive artistic legacy. Second, it is always good to recognize that what exists need not limit or prescribe future possibilities. Efforts to create self-consciously Mormon art, however, are probably (and rightly) doomed to failure. The gospel is universal, and one of the great challenges of our generation is to find that universal voice without minimizing or compromising the uniqueness of our mission. Because the gospel embraces all truth—even (and perhaps especially) artistic truth—we need to foster greater confidence in our own creativity as a people. We should consciously and consistently use the arts, as other communities have done, for introspection and exploration to discover and project the very best in ourselves. A real Latter-day Saint art, avoiding the twin plagues of didacticism and narcissism, would provide the impetus for living the gospel richly and vigorously, so that the wellsprings of our experience are full when the Lord would bless us with the gifts of his Spirit. Cumorah’s music ranges from high art to the songs of children, from the deeply serious to the comic. At each level there have been fresh and interesting ideas, although not without challenges and failures. Let us hope that the music of Cumorah, in both a real and a symbolic sense, has only just begun.
LOOK ONCE AGAIN AT

Cumorah's Hill

THE POET'S VIEW

LOUISE HELPS
CUMORAH IS ONE STEEP HILL among many, a tree-covered ridge much like others in its neighborhood, not especially high, not especially large, and not especially prominent in any other aspect. Yet Latter-day Saints have only to hear the word Cumorah for powerful images to come flooding into their minds—images of warfare and peace, destruction and protection, endings and beginnings, and wickedness and faithfulness.

Poetry, too, creates images to stir the emotions. As we read or hear the carefully crafted words of a poem, pictures flow though our minds and into our hearts. Within varying constraints of rhyme and meter, the poet chooses and arranges words with care so as to convey meaning with economy and intensity. Many of us have enjoyed the experience of writing poetry in an attempt to express the deepest feelings of our hearts. As readers in turn, we recognize that our own life experiences can amplify or alter the message and impact of a poem.

It is only natural, then, that the concept of Cumorah should have captured the hearts and imaginations of Latter-day Saint poets. So much of our history, both ancient and modern, is rooted in Cumorah and the people who lived and died there. We shake our heads disbelievingly at the hatred and despair that motivated Coriantumr and Shiz; our hearts are stirred each time we read of the tragic destruction of the Nephite nation. We feel Moroni’s anguish over the wasteful loss of his people but are filled with hope and then joy as we contemplate the fulfillment of his mission, both in and out of mortality. All of these feelings have been expressed, differently and at different times, in Latter-day Saint poetry.

Eighteen of these poems are presented here. They were collected by Robert Hughes from 170 years of church magazines and periodicals and
appear in their entirety as a supplement to this article in the order in which they were published. Although these poems deal in varied ways with the events and feelings that surround Cumorah, many of them share common threads, the most notable being Cumorah as the scene of ancient battles.

Just before the final destruction of the Jaredites, Moroni tells us in Ether 15:11, the army of Coriantumr pitched its “tents by the hill Ramah; and it was that same hill where my father Mormon did hide up the records unto the Lord, which were sacred.” In Mormon 6, Mormon tells of hiding the records that had been entrusted to him in a hill called Cumorah, from the top of which he surveyed the grim scene of his fallen people, utterly destroyed by the Lamanites the day before.

Although it is possible that the tragic, obliteratoring wars that engulfed the Jaredite and Nephite civilizations took place far from upstate New York, terrible irony—that such a beautiful, peaceful area could possibly be the site of the destruction of two nations—runs through Theodore E. Curtis’s poems “Cumorah” and “Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder” (two stanzas of which follow).

Twice a people’s last protection!
Twice a witness of a world,
In the arms of insurrection,
To prophetic ruin hurled:

Ramah, of the ancient nation,
Dawns thy day at last,
From your bosom comes salvation
And the story of the past.

Although his poem is titled “Moroni,” Donnell W. Hunter describes the final battle of the Jaredites. The Nephites are simply echoing, through their actions, what has happened at Cumorah before. Thus,

Why must men hurtle here in hate,
eager to find a foretold fate
on Cumorah?

In the first two stanzas of Roger Howey’s “Memories of Cumorah,” the destruction of the Jaredites and then the Nephites is recounted, but the two are not linked—their stories are simply told. It is left to the reader to recognize the repetition.

O little hill, thy name scarce known,
Had’st thou but tongue to tell

How on thy slopes,

‘Midst forlorn hopes,
The Jaredites in thousands fell,
Till none were left to mourn.

 Thou could’st recount the story true,
That sad and awful end,
Of Nephi’s race,
Upon thy face;
With prophet, relative, and friend,
All slain within thy view.

Inextricably linked with the story of Cumorah is the story of Moroni. Both the hill and the man were lonely guardians of the precious records, keeping them safely hidden until the time came to bring them forth to the world. Moroni’s mission is implicit in almost all the poems under consideration and is a primary focus of a few.

Moroni’s burial of the records echoes and emphasizes the death of his nation. In Dale Bjork’s “Those Quiet Rolling Woods,” we sense the dissonance the poet feels as he depicts the view that the Nephites’ final battle took place where Moroni’s last mortal effort with the plates occurred. He intertwines images of death and images of burying a nation and sacred records, as seen in the following lines:

Where Moroni knelt as if in prayer
And buried his people beneath the trees,
Buried them all in one small grave
Sealed by a stone and crisp, curling leaves.

Side by side with the images of death and burial are suggestions of new life and birth. In “Voice of Cumorah,” by Jo Adelaide Stock, the hill is represented as a mother holding and guarding the records within herself, ready to give birth to them at the appropriate time. Cumorah itself recounts:
The earth which long my treasure kept
Is holy earth;
Within my bosom close it slept
Until its birth.

The hill’s role as guardian, nurtur-er, and, in a sense, parent is reiterated in the next stanza:

To me a righteous prophet gave
The work of years;
To keep, to cherish and to save
Through trial and tears!

One of the most pervasive images in the selected poems is light. This light is sometimes contrasted with the darkness that came before and sometimes presented on its own. In any case, again and again we are shown the light that spilled forth from Cumorah. This image, representing in Latter-day Saint understanding revelation, truth, intelligence, and the gospel, as well as the pure sunlight of a spring morning—admixed thoroughly with the story of Joseph Smith—is frequently colored gold, reminding us of treasure, wealth, springtime, and, of course, the golden plates. Ruth May Fox’s “Cumorah” reads in part:

Look once again at Cumorah’s hill
    Where the morning beams their radiance spill
On Joseph’s face; through the golden light
    He looks on the form of an angel bright,
With the sheen of heaven, who gives him the plates—
    The golden leaves which open the gates
Of mystery.

Theodore E. Curtis, in “Historic Ramah’s Verdant Slope,” describes how

Last of a seeric line, Moroni sealed
And buried deep in lone Cumorah’s hill
The golden record of his vanished race.
Replete with prophecy and luminous
With truth it lay. . . .

And later, after a period of darkness and ruin:

Then gray-eyed dawn poured up a shaft of light
Across the starry empire of the night,
And, with the ancient standard high unfurled,
God’s flow’ring purpose ripened o’er the world.
Among the glories of the new born day
Cumorah’s mighty sentinel appeared
Robed in a light that paled the mid-day sun.

Parley P. Pratt’s “An Angel from on High” similarly employs the images of light and glory, as seen in this stanza:

The time is now fulfilled,
The long expected day;
Let earth obedience yield,
And darkness flee away;
Remove the seals, be wide unfurled
Its light and glory to the world.

“Let earth obedience yield” is an interesting line here, for it could be an exhortation to the people of the earth to yield to the truths of the gospel or an
exhortation to the brown earth of Cumorah to yield forth the sacred record that has so long remained hidden. Either or both actions will lead to “darkness fleeing away.”

Many scriptural allusions appear in these poems on Cumorah. Fox’s “Cumorah” refers to 2 Nephi 29:3, “A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible and there cannot be any more Bible”:

Away! Away with your ancient lore,
We have one Bible, we’ll brook no more;
The canon of scripture is all complete. . . .

The poem also refers to Isaiah 29:14, “for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid”:

So said the wise, with a haughty smile,
While the youthful see their lips revile. . . .

The allusion that appears repeatedly, however, echoes Isaiah 29:4, “thou shalt . . . speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and . . . shall whisper out of the dust.” This reference can be seen clearly in W. W. Phelps’s “An Angel Came Down”:

A heavenly treasure; a book full of merit;
It speaks from the dust, by the power of the Spirit. . . .
and appears again in Parley P. Pratt’s “An Angel from on High”:

Sealed by Moroni’s hand,
It has for ages lain,
To wait the Lord’s command,
From dust to speak again.

“A Nation Speaks from Out the Dust,” by Theodore E. Curtis, alludes to the prophecy in Isaiah 29:4 and 2 Nephi 26:16 in both the title and the body of the poem:

A nation speaks from out the dust!
Let Joseph’s scattered seed rejoice!

while “Historic Ramah’s Verdant Slope” reminds us that the Book of Mormon’s coming forth fulfills that prophecy:

’Twas prophecy’s fulfilment, that a race
Brought low should speak as from the silent dust.

and Minnie I. Hodapp’s “Angel-Guarded Book of Gold” ends with

Voice of love that cannot tire,
Lowly whispering from the dust!

In “An Acrostic,” by Phineas H. Young, the reference is less direct, but still the word dust in this context reminds us of Isaiah’s prophecy:

Buried in dust, I lay
On yonder mountain top. . . .

Written over a period of 170 years, these poems give us insight into the feelings and attitudes of the poets, as well as then-current fashions in poetry.

“An Angel Came Down,” by W. W. Phelps, and “An Angel from on High,” by Parley P. Pratt, were published in 1833 and 1840, respectively. Both have their metrical pattern faithfully reproduced in each stanza, evidence that they were probably written as hymns. Such consistent poetic meter is, of course, necessary for a hymn, making it possible for all verses to be sung easily to the same melody.

Both of these hymns tell the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, though the narrative nature of “An Angel from on High” contrasts with the exhortatory approach of “An Angel Came Down.” In “An Angel from on High,” Parley P. Pratt declares:

Lo, Israel filled with joy,
Shall now be gathered home,
Their wealth and means employ
To build Jerusalem.
While Zion shall arise and shine,
And fill the earth with truth divine.

while W. W. Phelps urges his audience:

O Israel! O Israel!
In all your abidings,
Prepare for your Lord
When you hear these glad tidings.
Listen O isles, and give ear ev’ry nation,
For great things await you in this generation:
The kingdom of Jesus, in Zion, shall flourish;
The righteous will gather; the wicked must perish.
Both hymns, however, celebrate the content of the sacred record, particularly the fulness of the gospel, and invite scattered Israel to gather and prepare for the coming of the Savior. They are joyful hymns, full of testimony and the excitement of the restoration.

Phineas H. Young’s “An Acrostic” was published in 1853. A literary device in which the first letter of each line combines with others to spell a word, acrostics were popular at the time. Young’s poem spells the words *Book of Mormon* in acrostic fashion. The wording in the poem is simple and straightforward. What is perhaps most notable is how succinctly, within the constraints of the verse form, Young describes the history and mission of the Book of Mormon, as well the gathering and glorious future of the tribes of Israel.

In two simple lines—

Make nations from the north  
O’erspread this promised land....

—he reminds us of the scattering and subsequent gathering of the ten tribes of Israel “from the land of the north” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:11) to America, the land of promise.

“Cumorah,” “Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder,” “A Nation Speaks from Out the Dust,” and “Historic Ramah’s Verdant Slope” were all written by Theodore H. Curtis. “Cumorah” was published in 1909, and the very similar “Hail Cumorah! Silent Wonder” in the hymn book of 1927. “A Nation Speaks from Out the Dust” and “Historic Ramah’s Verdant Slope” were published in 1927 and 1928, respectively. The tone of all of these poems is lofty, which may at first distance the reader from the works, but there are some golden nuggets hidden inside them.

Both “Cumorah” and “Hail Cumorah! Silent Wonder” use a pattern of alternating masculine and feminine rhyme. In masculine rhyme the emphasis and rhyme occur on the last syllable of the line, for example “world” and “hurled,” or “last” and “past.” In feminine rhyme the stress and rhyme are found in an earlier syllable, and the last syllable of the line is not stressed, for example, “protection” and “insurrection” or “nation” and “salvation.” This alternating pattern gives the poems a very polished sound and a sense of movement.

An interesting image in these two poems is that of the “story written on your heart of gold.” Several different but compatible meanings come to mind. A “heart of gold” is commonly used to describe kindness and benevolence—is the poet imbuing the hill, in its role as guardian of the records, with these characteristics? Scripturally, if something is written in our hearts, it becomes of paramount importance to us. In Jeremiah 31:33 the Lord says, “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” And then of course, the hill’s “heart of gold” just might refer to the golden plates hidden within its substance!

The brightest light one can imagine bursts out in Curtis’s “A Nation Speaks from Out the Dust”:

One hundred years have passed away  
Since pillowed in celestial flame,  
To Ramah’s slopes, dethroning day,  
The angel of the record came.

In “Historic Ramah’s Verdant Slope,” we see wickedness rolling over the land in waves:

The blighting shadows of iniquity  
Rolled o’er the crowning splendor of the land  
As night succeeds the glory of the day.

This water image is echoed later in the poem:

The dusky Lamanites, whose heritage  
Was ignorance, surged up and down the earth  
Like clashing billows of an angry sea.

“Clashing billows” suggests that the Nephites were not the only people the Lamanites hated, for the Lamanites fought among themselves as well (see Mormon 8:8).

In each of the four poems the poet refers to the Hill Cumorah by its Jaredite name, *Ramah*. This was also the name of a town on the border between the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah (between the tribal lands of Ephraim and Benjamin) and was the site of many battles between these tribes and nations. It is interesting to wonder just how ancient the name is and from what language it was derived.

The anonymous “Book of Mormon” and Minnie Hodapp’s “Angel-Guarded Book of Gold” were published in 1909 and 1930. Both center on the record and its coming forth rather than on Cumorah itself. “Book
of Mormon” is more exhortative, urging all the world to gather around its standard. Words such as Hail! and the alternation of masculine and feminine rhyme give a sense of excitement, movement, and rapid progress. An interesting line is “Buy the truth and sell it not,” reminding us of Isaiah 55:1, where the gospel is likened to everyday commodities: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

“Angel-Guarded Book of Gold,” on the other hand, is a gentle, contemplative poem, feeling like a prayer or the pronouncement of a blessing:

Angel-guarded book of gold  
   Daily strength and comfort lend;  
   Fraught with blessings manifold,  
   Like a joy-confiding friend.

“Cumorah Hill,” by J. M. White, and “The Solitary Scribe,” by Frank C. Steele, are narrative poems published in 1915 and 1919, respectively. “Cumorah Hill” is essentially rhyming prose. The first stanza tells the story of the Nephites’ final battle, the hiding of the records, and the latter-day retreat of the Lamanites before “more mighty foes.” The second stanza tells of Joseph Smith’s prayer and first vision, the coming of Moroni, and the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon. The poem has a simple a-b-a-b rhyme scheme, and the last four lines of the poem are tied to the first by the use of the same end-rhyming sounds.

“The Solitary Scribe” does not rhyme. The poet uses images of nature and the seasons to create the desired mood for his story. Thus the story, starting just after the Nephites’ last great battle, is set at the beginning of a cold night in early winter.

Shadows and silence fall o’er the earth,  
   As the sun, veiled in gath’ring clouds, dips low in the West.  
   A chilling wind sweeps up from the great Eastern Waters,  
   Its biting breath the herald of bleak Winter’s wrath.

The overwhelming presence of death and evil is represented by

   the screech of hawk and vulture,  
   Soaring and dipping like pirate frigates  
   On the maddened main.

Later, in the description of Moroni, we see images of light recur:

   He pauses—his eyes turn from the shining plates  
   Toward the leaning flames, which ’luminate  
   A visage, strong and finely-cut, softened with sorrow,  
   And furrowed with some mighty tragedy;  
   Two deep-set eyes that flash forth fire, then melt with love,  
   As yearningly they turn aloft for Light.

And at the end of the night, as morning approaches, Steele points out that this new day is also the dawn of idolatry:

   The sun-god, climbing out of orient seas,  
   Proclaims the doom of Night, the birth of Day.

Ruth May Fox’s “Cumorah” (1923) and Willard Bishop’s “Moroni’s Visit” (1925) tell essentially the same story. The coming of Moroni to Joseph Smith led to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the fulness of the gospel. Willard Bishop walks us through the story at a stately, dignified pace, reminding us on the way that Moroni was the angel that John the Beloved saw flying “in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6). Fox’s poem darts into and out of the story, raising on the way a triumphant banner for the restoration. The rhythms she uses in the poem, the patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables, varying from line to line and within lines, create a picture of a Christian soldier dancing confidently into war. Half the stanzas start by giving orders to the enemy:

   Away! Away with your ancient lore. . . .  
   Behold, ye scoffers! . . .  
   Look once again at Cumorah’s hill. . . .

And the poem ends with a joyful statement of inevitable victory:

   The Book goes forth on its shining way  
   Nor earth nor hell its power can stay.

“Memories of Cumorah,” by Roger Howey, published in 1927, and “Voice of Cumorah,” by Jo
Adelaide Stock, published in 1946, use as few and as simple words as possible to convey a powerful message. Howey addresses the hill using the language of prayer and invites it to recount its history. One hundred years have passed, he reminds us, since

\textit{thou didst yield,}
\textit{To guard and shield,}
\textit{To Joseph Smith, at God’s behest,}
\textit{Those treasured plates of gold.}

“Voice of Cumorah,” in contrast, is written in first person. Here the “trial and tears,” while acknowledged, are downplayed; the emphasis instead is placed on treasure, blessings, and reward. With joy, the hill delights in its blessedness:

\textit{To every saint o’er land and sea}
\textit{I am a shrine!}

“Seed of Promise,” by Betty Ventura, published in 1959, is a sonnet. Comprising 14 lines, it is written in iambic pentameter—10 syllables to a line, alternating stressed and unstressed, ending each line with a stressed syllable. This sonnet is divided into an octet (the first 8 lines) and a sestet (the last 6). The octet reveals the tragedy of the destruction of the Nephite nation—

\textit{The golden age is o’er, the record sealed}
\textit{—while the sestet holds promise for the future:}

\textit{That they, the once rebellious blood, might stand—}
\textit{Where once stood Lehi’s other sons—and bear}
\textit{Their father’s witness in a Gentile land.}

We note the ambiguity of the word \textit{father} here, as it can refer to a mortal or the eternal father.

Dale Bjork’s “Those Quiet Rolling Woods,” published in 1976, is at once appealing and disturbing. It describes one quiet hour at Cumorah when Moroni buried the plates, and it leaves the reader wanting more. This sense of incompleteness is partly due to the structure of the piece—the entire poem comprises one fragment of one sentence. And just as the end of the poem comes without the completion of the sentence, so we know that the burial of the plates, and in a sense the burial of Moroni’s people, is not the end of the story.

The last and most recent poem in the collection, “Moroni,” by Donnell W. Hunter, was published in 1987. It too is set in the time of the burial of the plates. Looking back on the history of the Jaredites and the Nephites, the poet laments their hate-filled hurtling toward Cumorah. And while the conclusion clearly refers to the two great journeys from Babel and Jerusalem, it has a universality that includes all those who have found the restored gospel. The great prophet Lehi declared that “there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:6). So it is true for all Latter-day Saints, and particularly for those living in America that

\textit{we came}
\textit{led by that same hand}
\textit{through desert sand}
\textit{and over seas}
\textit{until fulfilling forecast destinies}
\textit{we found Cumorah.}

To explore these poems is to embark on a pilgrimage through the sacred history of the Hill Cumorah. Our hearts and our minds open, and we find ourselves sitting on that steep hillside, watching the fierce battles, feeling the sorrow of Moroni as he buries the golden plates, and witnessing the joy and wonder of Joseph Smith as he unearths them. From this vantage point we can gaze, too, toward the future, wondering what other great scenes this hill will yet behold and what depth of understanding a new generation of poets will bring to us.
THE POEMS

1. An Angel Came Down

An angel came down from the mansions of glory,  
And told that a record was hid in Cumorah,  
Containing the fulness of Jesus's gospel;  
And also the cov'nant to gather his people.  
O Israel! O Israel!  
In all your abidings,  
Prepare for your Lord  
When you hear these glad tidings.  
A heavenly treasure; a book full of merit;  
It speaks from the dust, by the power of the Spirit;  
A voice from the Savior that saints can rely on,  
To prepare for the day when he brings again Zion.  
O Israel! O Israel!  
In all your abidings,  
Prepare for your Lord  
When you hear these glad tidings.  

A voice from the Saviour that saints can rely on,  
To prepare for the day when he brings again Zion.  

Listen O isles, and give ear ev'ry nation,  
For great things await you in this generation:  
The kingdom of Jesus, in Zion, shall flourish;  
The righteous will gather; the wicked must perish.  
O Israel! O Israel!  
In all your abidings,  
Prepare for your Lord  
When you hear these glad tidings.  

Lo, Israel filled with joy,  
Shall now be gathered home,  
Their wealth and means employ  
To build Jerusalem.  
While Zion shall arise and shine,  
And fill the earth with truth divine.  

(By W. W. Phelps, in “New Hymns,”  
Evening and Morning Star, February 1833)

2. An Angel From on High

An angel from on high,  
The long, long silence broke;  
Descending from the sky,  
These gracious words he spoke:  
Lo, in Cumorah’s lonely hill  
A sacred record lies concealed.  
Sealed by Moroni’s hand,  
It has for ages lain,  
To wait the Lord’s command,  
From dust to speak again.  
It shall again to light come forth,  
To usher in Christ’s reign on earth.  
It speaks of Joseph’s seed,  
And makes the remnant known  
Of nations long since dead,  
Who once had dwelt alone.  
The fulness of the Gospel, too,  
Its pages will reveal to view.  
The time is now fulfilled,  
The long expected day;  
Let earth obedience yield,  
And darkness flee away;  
Remove the seals, be wide unfurled  
Its light and glory to the world.  

Lo, Israel filled with joy,  
Shall now be gathered home,  
Their wealth and means employ  
To build Jerusalem.  
While Zion shall arise and shine,  
And fill the earth with truth divine.  

(By Parley P. Pratt, in George D. Pyper, “The Story of Our Hymns,” Improvement Era 39,  
no. 10 [October 1936])

3. An Acrostic

Buried in dust, I lay  
On yonder mountain top,  
On earth I could not stay,  
Kind heaven hid me up.  
O! may I yet come forth,  
For man’s deliverance stand,  
Make nations from the north  
O’erspread this promised land;  
Rejoice with Israel’s race,  
Make this their dwelling place,  
On earth to see His face,  
No more to sin.  

(By Phineas H. Young, in Millennial Star, 7 May 1853)

4. Cumorah

One of time’s sublimest pages  
Annal thy prophetic dawn,  
Voice of the unstoried ages,  
Tombstone of their nations gone!  

Twice a people’s last protection,  
Twice the witness of a world  
In the arms of insurrection,  
To prophetic ruin hurled.  

Now you come, a flood of glory  
Streaming o’er your visage old:  
With their prehistoric story  
Written on your heart of gold;  
Teeming with the gospel leaven,  
Lifted by an angel hand,  
In the very light of heaven,  
To the eyes of every land.  

Ramah of the ancient nation,  
The Cumorah of the last,  
From your bosom comes salvation,  
The story of the past!  

(By Theodore E. Curtis, Improvement Era 12,  
no. 5 [March 1909])
5. **Book of Mormon**

Book of Mormon, hid for ages,
In Cumorah’s lonely hill;
Written by those ancient sages
Whom Jehovah taught His will;
Glad we hail it,
Fulness of the Gospel still.

Hail the record, Saints of Zion,
Hidden by Moroni’s hand,
Till the God our souls rely on,
Unto Joseph gave command
To translate it,
Send it forth to every land.

Hail the glorious light of Nephi,
Hail the truth that Alma taught;
We will trust in God like Lehi;
Seek the Lord as Mormon sought;
Like Moroni,
Buy the truth and sell it not.

Israel, gather ‘round this standard,
Laman, see thy guiding star,
Judah, rally ‘round thy banner,
Come, ye Gentiles from afar;
Book of Mormon,
It is truth’s triumphal car!

(By J. M. White, in *Liahona, the Elder’s Journal*, 16 February 1915)

6. **Cumorah Hill**

Fierce raged the fight; a wild, barbarian horde,
Thirsting for blood, surged like a stormy sea,
Around a little band, wielding the spear and sword,
Seeking to live and evermore be free,
Fast fell they there, as grass before blade,
Until but one remained, who then in deep despair,
By night, in secret there, the tribal records laid,
Then died alone, last of his nation there.

The stately centuries in slow procession passed,
Safely, the record, in security on the hill reposed,
New cities rose, and the Lamanites at last,
Retreated in their turn before more mighty foes,
New sects, new creeds, in clash of bitter strife,
Proclaimed most brazenly, “Ours is way to go;”
Each heaping curses on the others rule of life,
And on it sits a figure deep in thought—and writing
With a deftness born of master hand and mind.

He pauses—his eyes turn from the shining plates
Toward the leaning flames, which ‘luminate
A visage, strong and finely-cut, softened with sorrow,
And furrowed with some mighty tragedy;
Two deep-set eyes that flash forth fire, then melt with love,
As yearningly they turn aloft for Light.

Who is this man of grief, secreted and alone,
Alas, ‘tis he—sole remnant of his race—
Moroni, the Solitary Scribe.

Moroni, the seer, the prophet, prophet’s son;
Moroni, the well-beloved of God;
Chosen and blessed through triumph in less lofty spheres;
Exalted through the conquest of himself,
And faith unfailing in the Living God,
The God of Lehi, Nephi, Alma and his noble sire.

This is Moroni, hidden from the prowling Lamanites,
Who seek his life because of savage hate.
Their hosts have triumphed on the battle-field,
And Nephite men, both small and great,
Bowmen, spearmen, swordsmen, captains—all,
Now lie in rotting heaps upon the earth.
Their wives, fair daughters of the once proud Zarahemla,
Are cold in death, ravished and slain;
Their children, victims of the curse and innocent,
And at a later day, Moroni, glorious, came
With his grand revelation, to the obedient seer,
Who felt with heaven’s fire, his soul aflame.
At last the records were unto the world restored,
And now in distant lands and islands of the sea,
Still goes the message, a potent living word,
A sign and wonder to all men, forevermore to be.

(By unacknowledged author, in *Liahona, the Elder’s Journal*, 6 November 1909)
Have fallen 'neath the warm, wet sword,
Forced to suffer for parental sin.
Erase the awful scene, O God of Heaven!
This grim reminder of a nation's guilt.
Would that it might be hid eternally
Beneath the wreck and ruin of a race.
But this, alas, can never be.
The Past must needs be bared
To guide the children of the Present Day,
Who, if they ape the foolish dead,
Must in the future reap the same reward.
History's a monument of enduring Truth—
Austere it stands, the woe and weal of Time:
Its base the bones of empires built by Might;
Its shaft the souls of martyrs slain for Right;
Its pinnacle the fadeless Star of Bethlehem.

So, from the pen inspired of this sad scribe,
The chapters grow, writ in imperishable gold.
The hours advance, and in the cloudy sky
The wan, white moon moves silent in its course.
Midnight passes; the scribe still writes;
The first faint glow of dawn
Fringes the eastern heavens.
And with the falling of the morning dew,
The task is finished. The plates engraved
Are sealed for purposes best known to Him
Who rules in wisdom, majesty and power.
Sealed by Moroni, sealed with scalding tears
That spring from a heart torn open-wide with grief—
Grief for his brethren now in Paradise,
Waiting in fearful agony the eye of God.
O Man, a fearful, burning hell is thine indeed,
If, after drinking deep the nectar of the spheres,
Thou turnest to the wine of luxury and lust and war—
Lurid phantoms, dreams that perish, wild deliriums
That beckon to the abyss of despair.
O Man, debased, they wine so sweet to quaff,
Becomes as wormwood to thy dry, parched lips.
The fire burns low—the embers slowly die—
The sun-god, climbing out of orient seas,
Proclaims the doom of Night, the birth of Day.
From out the cavern stealthy steals the scribe,
Bearing the precious records of his race.
His eyes free scan the landscape, and his steps
Turn toward the sturdy cavern of stone.
Therein are placed the sacred plates of gold,
The sword of Laban and the shield,
The Thummim of the Seers, a gift from God,
There to repose until Jehovah's voice
Shall call them forth.

Moroni's task is done. The plates are now secure;
A cloud is lifted from his weary countenance.
He kneels in fervent prayer, then draws his robe
About him. And with hasty step
He leaves Cumorah by a winding path.
And in a moment more the Solitary Scribe is lost
to view—

Lost in the forest's unfrequented depths,
There, till the summons Home shall come,
He roams the melancholy earth alone with God.

(By Frank C. Steele, in *Improvement Era* 12, no. 4 [February 1919])

8. Cumorah

Away! Away with your ancient lore,
We have one Bible, we'll brook no more;
The canon of scripture is all complete,
The wisdom of ages lie at our feet;
Since Science has turned her gilded key
All that has been, all that shall be,
Will swiftly unfold, no need appears
For new revelation, for prophets or seers.

So said the wise, with a haughty smile,
While the youthful seer their lips revile;
The meek and lowly saw dreams fulfilled—
"The Lord is God," every doubt was stilled.
But right is might, 'spite the world's dark frown,
As ever Truth wears a jeweled crown;
Though viciously hurled from her rightful throne,
Triumphant she comes into her own.

Behold, ye scoffers! yon sacred mound
The site of an ancient battle-ground,
Where nations, forgetful of God and man,
Fought to the death. Their red blood ran
'Til a race was drained; one man alone
Survived the carnage; with sorrow prone
Moroni buried the records deep,
With a prayer to God that the earth should keep
Them safe for the remnant of the land,
Should a few be spared of that stricken band;
That the faith of their fathers, their woes, their pain,
Might preserve the children from sin's deep stain.

Look once again at Cumorah's hill
Where the morning beams their radiance spill
On Joseph's face; through the golden light
He looks on the form of an angel bright,
With the sheen of heaven, who gives him the plates—
The golden leaves which open the gates
Of mystery. The records teem
With words prophetic—a living stream
Concerning this land—Moroni's land
Which God preserved with an outstretched hand,
That here His banner might be unfurled
Which should wave good cheer to a failing world.

The Book goes forth on its shining way
Nor earth nor hell its power can stay.
An immortal man, a mortal youth
Ordained to flood the world with truth.

(By Ruth May Fox, in *Relief Society Magazine*,
August 1923; reprinted by permission, The
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)
9. Moroni’s Visit

A hundred years have passed
Since down unto the world
An angel came from God,
The gospel flag unfurled;
The gospel flag of peace,
Proclaiming unto men
The time was close at hand
When Christ would come again.

He unto Joseph spake,
Instructions to him gave;
Revealed the gospel plan
A dying world to save,
And told of records rare
Hid in Cumorah’s hill,
That now should be revealed
The prophets to fulfill.

A prophet warrior he,
This angel who now came,
He once had lived on earth,
Moroni was his name,
He was the messenger
Whom John beheld would fly
Through heaven’s vast expanse
And loud to men would cry.

Joseph his words did heed
Although but then a youth,
With zeal he worked, until
He gave his life for truth:
And now we thank our God
As we our voices raise
To testify these truths,
And speak Jehovah’s praise.

(By Willard Bishop, in Improvement Era 28, no. 7 [May 1925]; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

10. Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder

Hail, Cumorah! silent wonder
Of the hidden ages gone;
Lo, the foot print of the thunder
Bares your treasure to the dawn.

And Moroni, clothed in glory
Crowns your visage old,
To reveal the ancient story
Written on your heart of gold.

Twice a people’s last protection!
Twice a witness of a world,
In the arms of insurrection,
To prophetic ruin hurled:

Ramah, of the ancient nation,
Dawns thy day at last,
From your bosom comes salvation
And the story of the past.

(By Theodore E. Curtis, in Latter-Day Hymns [1927]; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

11. A Nation Speaks From Out the Dust

Rejoice, O Earth! while tempests rage,
The Dispensation’s early morn
Brings forth a wonder of the age—
A modern miracle is born!

One hundred years have passed away
Since pillowed in celestial flame,
To Ramah’s slopes, dethroning day,
The angel of the record came.

To Joseph, God’s anointed Seer,
He gave the Book of Mormon old
That lay reposed from year to year
There in Cumorah’s virgin mold.

A nation speaks from out the dust!
Let Joseph’s scattered seed rejoice!
The pages of that sacred trust
Are vibrant with Jehovah’s voice.

His words of life are written there;
His promises and precepts old;
And gems of hidden wisdom rare
Adorn that sacred book of gold.

Sweet with the voice of hallowed Seers
From age to hoary age it lay,
The story of forgotten years
And struggling nation passed away,

To issue forth in latter days
From ancient Ramah’s sacred sod,
To reconcile a darkened race
And vindicate the ways of God.

(By Theodore E. Curtis, in Improvement Era 30, no. 11 [September 1927]; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

12. Memories of Cumorah

O little hill, thy name scarce known,
Had’st thou but tongue to tell
How on thy slopes,
’Midst forlorn hopes,
The Jaredites in thousands fell,
Till none were left to mourn.

Thou could’st recount the story true,
That sad and awful end,
Of Nephi’s race,
Upon thy face;
With prophet, relative, and friend,
All slain within thy view.

Tell of Moroni on thy crest,
Mourning for friend and foe;
Custodian great,
Of inscribed plate,
He brought, and there did bury low
And hide within thy breast.

Of all the scenes thou could’st unfold
To us, we’d like this best:
When thou did’st yield,
To guard and shield,
To Joseph Smith, at God’s behest,
Those treasured plates of gold.

One hundred years have passed away
And gone beyond recall;
Yet our bosoms swell,
When’er we tell
Of TRUTH restored for one and all
In God’s appointed way.

(By Roger Howey, in Improvement Era 30, no. 11 [September 1927]; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

13. Historic Ramah’s Verdant Slope

The nation crumbled and its sun went down,
The blighting shadows of iniquity
Rolled o’er the crowning splendor of the land
As night succeeds the glory of the day.
Last of a seeric line, Moroni sealed
And buried deep in lone Cumorah’s hill
The golden record of his vanished race.
Replete with prophecy and luminous
With truth it lay, while down the lapse of time
The aloes bloomed and drooped and passed away.
Wide o’er the land night’s rayless curtain fell
And rampart wall, the ornate citadel,
Passed into hopeless ruin and decay.
The dusky Lamanites, whose heritage
Was ignorance, surged up and down the earth
Like clashing billows of an angry sea.
Then gray-eyed dawn poured up a shaft of light
Across the starry empire of the night,
And, with the ancient standard high unfurled,
God’s flow’ring purpose ripened o’er the world.

I am a hill of stone and clay,
Of grass and tree;
A sacred record, ancient, lay
Hidden in me!

The earth which long my treasure kept
Is holy earth;
Within my bosom close it slept
Until its birth.

To me a righteous prophet gave
The work of years;
To keep, to cherish and to save
Through trial and tears!

I’ve felt the blessed holy tread
Of Angels’ feet!
I heard the words Moroni said,
And oh, how sweet!

Call me thrice blessed! Hark to me!
Reward is mine!
To every saint o’er land and sea
I am a shrine!

(By Jo Adelaide Stock, in Relief Society Magazine, April 1946; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)
16. Seed of Promise

At Cumorah’s close, like shattered stone,
Ten thousand Nephite warriors strew the field.
The golden age is o’er, the record sealed:
Moroni walks a wilderness alone.

Gone the prophet-kings, the loyal few,
Gone those of burning faith, contriteness, trust.
White templed cities crumble into a dust
Where kneeling throngs their Savior’s blessing knew.

But yet shall Mormon’s record be unearthed,
That to Lehi’s seed it might declare
The destiny and honor of their birth;
Where once stood Lehi’s other sons—and bear
Their father’s witness in a Gentile land.

(By Betty Ventura, in Improvement Era, 62, no. 10 [October 1959]; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

17. Those Quiet Rolling Woods

Those quiet, rolling woods,
Where the weight of silence, lifted
Only by the swirling of crisp leaves
Stirred by demurring winds,
Hung like a battered shield
Over the bare-armed trees,
Over the brown and soundless hills—
Where the sky, like a veil, a thin grey hush,
Was drawn over a pale and passing sun
That sank like the breast of a wounded dove—
Where Moroni knelt as if in prayer
And buried his people beneath the trees,
Buried them all in one small grave
Sealed by a stone and crisp, curling leaves.

(By Dale Bjork, Ensign, March 1976; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

18. Moroni

The stone now rests in place,
its edges carefully concealed in turf
as if unturned since Ramah times
when first this hill heard battle cries,
first felt the heavy marching feet
of armed and angry men
who fought like giants
one week’s war—
till only one survived,
his headless foe beneath his fainting feet.
Why must men hurtle here in hate,
eager to find a foretold fate
on Cumorah?
The records in place,
hidden in the cave below
and in them all our work—
our lives.
From towered Babel,
walled Jerusalem,
we came
led by that same hand
through desert sand
and over seas
until fulfilling forecast destinies
we found Cumorah.

(By Donnell W. Hunter, Ensign, June 1987; reprinted by permission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)
The Hill Cumorah Monument, in enduring bronze and granite, stands as a testimony to all nations, kindred, tongues and people that the angel spoken of by John the Revelator has indeed come to earth. It also expresses our thanks to God for His kindness in revealing these things to us.

—Torleif S. Knaphus, June 1935
**The Maturing Artist**

After a short time, Torleif’s father recognized the talent his young son had been given. Torleif painted portraits of famous people he saw in the newspaper, and his father would put them on the family’s barn by the road for people to see and hopefully buy. Young Torleif also carved heads of birds and people in wood.³ An entry in his journal reveals his early love of art and the development of his artistic temperament:

> As I grew, I turned out to be different than my brothers. . . . One could find me sitting with my little sketchbook eagerly occupied creating what my imagination brought to mind. . . . And in the warm twilight of summer evenings one could have seen me leave my bedroom and run outside to enjoy the spiritual sweetness of the beautiful summer night. . . . This was solace to my soul.⁴

Fifteen-year-old Torleif started his art apprenticeship at a nearby town by painting houses and decorative furniture. At 17, like his Viking ancestors before him, he became a merchant seaman on the North Sea. On his voyages he was impressed with the beauties of the ocean sunrises and sunsets, the stunning midnight sun, and the northern lights.⁵ After two years, and partly due to his mother’s pleadings, Torleif gave up being a seaman. He explained: “When our little vessel was tossed around by giant blue-green waves under the most dramatic sky in the great Atlantic zone, I decided firmly to be an artist.”⁶ Though Torleif was a promising athlete, in 1901, at age 19, he traveled to the Norwegian capital of Kristiania (now Oslo) to pursue formal studies in art.

While Torleif was living in Kristiania, a roommate tackled and pinned him and another friend to the floor, “demanding us to buy tickets to a concert,” Torleif later recorded. The three roommates enjoyed the Latter-day Saint musical concert, which introduced Torleif to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The three also went to other Latter-day Saint meetings. Torleif recalled, “It was easy for me to see and understand that this was the only true Church of God.”⁷

Three months after being introduced to the gospel, 21-year-old Torleif was baptized in a fjord frozen over with two inches of ice that had to be cut through. Torleif’s strong desire to be with the other Saints in Salt Lake City led him to turn down an art scholarship in Rome and to immigrate to
Utah in 1905. He found comfort in attending meetings with other Saints who had come from Scandinavia. Torleif particularly enjoyed serving the Lord through researching the lives of his ancestors, doing their temple work, and sharing his testimony through his artwork.

Sculptor for the Church

Emelia (Millie) Christensen became Torleif Knaphus's wife in 1909. Soon after, Torleif began to work for the church on numerous art projects. He started with decorative work in the Salt Lake Tabernacle and other church buildings, including carving the large rosette gracing the ceiling of the Salt Lake Temple's celestial room as well as the decorative sconces in that room.

In 1913 he went on a mission for the church to study art in Paris for one and a half years. On the way back to Utah, he studied art for four more months in New York City. After arriving home, he was asked to help with the artwork in the Hawaii Temple. Next he was commissioned to sculpt the oxen for the Alberta Temple's baptismal font as well as the awe-inspiring frieze "Jesus, the Fountain-head of the Church," which depicts Jesus teaching the woman of Samaria at the well. For the Arizona Temple, the church commissioned him to sculpt the baptismal font and the terra-cotta friezes around the exterior of the temple.

A few years before the church acquired the Hill Cumorah property in 1928, Torleif completed perhaps his most notable artwork—the original Handcart Pioneers statue. In 1947 he completed a larger-than-life replica of that statue for the Salt Lake Temple grounds. Torleif also sculpted busts of several church and civic leaders and was known among the Brethren on a first-name basis.

The Proposal to the Brethren

From the time the church acquired the property comprising the Hill Cumorah, Torleif had often spoken to the Brethren about creating a monument on that hallowed hill. His firm testimony of the restoration of the gospel created a desire to honor in a tangible way the sacred event of the angel Moroni’s visiting Joseph Smith and eventually giving him the gold plates to translate. On several occasions in his life, Torleif sought guidance and inspiration by climbing historic Ensign Peak overlooking the Salt Lake Valley and making his projects a matter of prayer. This time in 1929 was no different.

Torleif’s creative thoughts for a future Hill Cumorah Monument were not written in any of his journals, probably because they involved a sacred experience that he was reluctant to relate in detail. However, two accounts provide glimpses of this creative process and the unforgettable experience that accompanied it.

The first account is associated with Willard and Rebecca Bean, who lived at the Joseph Smith family farm during their 24-year mission in Palmyra, New York, to acquire properties in that area for the church. They became very good friends with Torleif Knaphus over the years. In 1964, at a fireside in Salt Lake City, Sister Bean shared these remarkable details:

Brother Knaphus told me this story. . . . As soon as he heard that we owned the Hill Cumorah, he started making sketches of what he thought an Angel Moroni monument and statue should look like. No one asked him to do this or knew what he was doing. After he had finished seven sketches, one evening all alone he climbed Ensign Peak which looks southward over Salt Lake Valley. In the darkness of night he laid the seven sketches out on the ground...
and then he knelt in prayer asking the Lord if he had done the wrong thing. He asked the Lord to show him which one would be the right one to take to the Church Authorities, and if it was right and proper for him to even go to them. When he opened his eyes there was a light all around him and he could see every one of the seven sketches, even though it was dark. And then he saw an angel\(^\text{10}\) pointing with his finger to the one that he [Brother Knaphus] thought was the best and heard the angel say, “This is the one.” And then he asked, “How will I approach the Brethren? What will they think? Have I done the right thing to do this?” Then he, the angel, said, “You go to the Church offices in the morning. They will be waiting for you.”\(^\text{11}\)

Torleif went to the Church Administration Building the next morning to meet with the Brethren. After proposing that a monument be placed at the recently acquired Hill Cumorah, he laid before them the seven drawings\(^\text{12}\) that depicted the monument and the angel Moroni. They looked them over and unanimously adopted the design that the heavenly finger had pointed to the previous night. The design was set in place, and permission was given for Torleif to continue with the project.

The second account of Torleif’s sacred experience comes from his second wife, Rebecca Marie Knaphus. She said the artist once told her that, during this period of time, Moroni visited him. She said he described him as being dressed in a white military-type outfit. It was an experience too sacred for him to elaborate on, even to her. She said that he gave no details to her about how, when, or where the sacred event occurred and that he seldom spoke about it.\(^\text{13}\)

The church commissioned Torleif to sculpt the 10-foot, gold-plated statue of the angel Moroni and to design and create the granite pillar and base of the monument (the latter two totaling 30 feet in height). He spent five years on the design and creation of this monument—more than double the time spent on any other single art project he undertook in his life.\(^\text{14}\) That a lot of thought and prayer went into this monument is seen in the detail of the angel Moroni statue and the bronze reliefs at the monument’s base as well as in the surprising degree of symbolism the sculptor employed.

The design and creation of the Angel Moroni Monument were Knaphus’s consuming passion for five years. All photos in this article courtesy of the author unless otherwise noted.
symbolism of the monument

Fortunately, the sculptor explicitly wrote of the monument’s symbolism because of a special, personal experience.¹⁵ When David O. McKay, then second counselor in the First Presidency, visited the completed monument at the Hill Cumorah, he marveled at the imposing granite base and wondered about any possible significance or symbolism. When Torleif explained what his design intended to portray, President McKay was impressed. He asked Torleif to write down his explanation so the church could produce a plaque spelling out the symbolism for visitors to the monument. Placed several yards from the monument itself, the plaque explains:


The Hill Cumorah Monument was the sculptor’s own expression to the world of the historic event when the angel Moroni delivered the ancient records known as the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith. Torleif explained:

The Hill Cumorah Monument has an appearance of the symbolic pillar of light with upward leading lines so designed as to draw the thought of man towards Heaven and God and give heed to the Gospel plan. The large figure at the top of the shaft represents Moroni in a position as though calling the inhabitants of the Earth to reverence of the Gospel message. His right hand is pointed towards heaven and in his left hand he holds the record.

The monument’s rich symbolism is elegantly subdued yet deeply meaningful.
On the west panel is shown Moroni delivering the plates to the young man Joseph, indeed one of the most remarkable dealings of God with man. God did not only reveal and speak to man but through His holy servant brought tangible material plates on which was written the Gospel plan as Jesus taught it to the people on this continent after His death and resurrection in Palestine.

... [O]n the south panel [are] three others [who] were permitted to see them by the power and glory of God. An angel of the Lord stood before them holding the plates in his hands and showed them the engravings thereon. He commanded them also to testify of the same and a voice was heard from above saying that this record was true and the translation is correct. In addition to these witnesses, Joseph was permitted to show the plates to eight other men who handled them and examined the inscription thereon. This is shown on the east panel.

The inscription of the north panel is taken from the last book of this record called the “Book of Moroni,” which consists mostly of counsels and exhortations [sic] to the people of the time this record should come forth.

It was through careful planning that this north panel containing the exhortation of Moroni faced the Sacred Grove, three miles away, where Joseph Smith received the heavenly visit of the Father and his Son.

Torleif took time to meticulously hand carve in clay the north panel with the wording of Moroni’s challenge. Torleif’s preteen daughter, Marie Knaphus, was visiting Torleif at his studio when she asked the artist why the last panel just had words on it and why he didn’t do another “pretty” panel instead. Realizing a spiritual teaching moment, the caring father put his art tools down, swiveled his stool, and looked directly into the eyes of his young daughter. He said, “Dear, this is the prettiest panel of all, and I hope that one day you’ll come to understand, like I have, the true meaning of these special words.”

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Moroni 10:4)
The Image of an Angel

Torleif envisioned the angel Moroni not as the world sees a “typical angel” but as the strong, ancient American prophet who was also a warrior and a respected leader among his people. With approval given for the monument, Torleif searched for an ideal candidate to pose for the image of the angel—undoubtedly the same image that was still fresh in his mind. He found the appropriate physique in a new friend, Elwin Clark, a bricklayer who had recently constructed a fireplace for the artist at his home in the Sugarhouse area of Salt Lake City. Clark had the muscular body Torleif sought to depict, and he agreed to pose for this special assignment.20

However, Torleif felt that Elwin Clark’s face was too young to represent the mature and stately visage of the prophet Moroni. Torleif prayed and fasted to find a suitable model for the face of the angel. Because he traveled by public transportation to and from his studio in Salt Lake City, Torleif frequently walked wherever he needed to go once he was downtown. He used those occasions to search for an appropriate model. One day an older, bearded gentleman caught his attention. After following him for quite some time, Torleif explained in his “thick Norwegian accent,”21 that he would like to use the gentleman’s face to depict Moroni of old. The man was a rancher who had just moved back to Utah from Wyoming. With much discussion, Torleif finally persuaded him to follow him to his studio.

Younger Elwin Clark was already in the studio when Torleif brought the rancher in to pose for the face of the angel Moroni. To Torleif’s surprise, the older gentleman was Hyrum Don Carlos Clark, Elwin’s father.22 Torleif and the two Clarks realized they had been chosen as an answer to Torleif’s prayers to find suitable models for the image of the angel.

The Placement of the Monument

A tragedy came to Torleif during the construction of the Hill Cumorah Monument. His wife suddenly died in 1931, and he was left with seven children ranging in age from 20 years down to 16 months. He was both father and mother to his children for the majority of the time he worked on the monument.

In the summer of 1934, one year before the completion and dedication of the monument, Torleif accompanied Presiding Bishop Sylvester Q. Cannon and church architect Lorenzo Young and
their wives to the Hill Cumorah in New York. There they were to meet with the mission president and his wife. Torleif recounted this visit in his journal:

As we came to Palmyra, it seemed like coming home. It appears so clean and nice. There are large beautiful shade trees, nicely preserved and well-painted homes and stores. We found the road leading to the Smith Farm and a few minutes later, we were there.

We met Brother Willard Bean in charge of the Smith Farm and other Church property there. After a few moments’ conversation, we drove over to the Hill Cumorah. As we got the first sight of the Hill, it appeared much finer in contour and line than I ever expected; and as we came nearer, it held its own in beauty and general appearance.

We drove up on the very top and what a wonderful sight it was. Rich fields, rolling hills with groves and farmhouses. . . . It was with quite a feeling of reverence that I walked over that ground where heavenly beings had walked and talked to man in this modern time. I felt the importance and responsibility of my visit there, and humbly wished that I would be able to finish the work I was doing in commemorating the restoration of the ancient American records.²³

One of the main reasons Torleif was sent to the Hill Cumorah was to establish an exact location for the monument and the direction it should face. “We proceeded and experimented just where to place the Monument and what way to turn it,” Torleif recorded. “We went down, drove up and down the highway, passing the Hill so as to see on which place it would appear the best and back again to the top of the Hill. The sun was just setting in the West, throwing its last mid-

Sculptor Torleif Knaphus oversees the placement of the gold-plated statue atop its imposing granite base and pillar.
The pale full moon had just risen in the eastern sky, giving a beautiful contrast to the warm floating clouds.

The next day the decision was made to place the monument so that the gold-leafed bronze statue would face north toward the Sacred Grove and the Smith family farm. It would also be facing what was then the Canandaigua Road. In 1934 the hill was fairly devoid of trees. By the time the monument was dedicated the next year, 10,000 trees had been planted on Hill Cumorah.

In 1976 church leaders decided to rotate the angel Moroni statue 90 degrees to the west to face Highway 21 and to be in view of the ever-increasing pageant audiences. It was also decided to undertake a 30-year project to replace most of the trees with hardwood trees such as maple, ash, and beech.

Torleif made one more visit to the Hill Cumorah when the monument was erected and dedicated on 21 July 1935. President Heber J. Grant gave the dedicatory prayer to a crowd of over 2,000 attendees, in which he traced the pilgrimage of “a persecuted people” from New York State through Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and finally into the Great Salt Lake Basin in Utah. President David O. McKay offered further remarks concerning the history of the church and declared, “There is no monument in the world today with which greater things are associated.”

In 1940, at age 58, Torleif Knaphus married Rebecca Marie Jacobson and later had six additional children. He died at age 83 on 14 June 1965 in Salt Lake City.

When we ponder the spiritual guidance that Torleif sought and received for the Hill Cumorah Monument, we realize that he was an instrument in the hands of the Lord in creating a tribute to his own testimony of the gospel. The humble Norwegian immigrant who found the restored gospel was privileged with the rare opportunity to add his testimony to the great latter-day work in a most inspiring and enduring manner that will continue to touch countless lives. Referring to the monument, he stated in his typical humble manner:

I trust that the imperfection of my work will not be an offense, but that whoever sees this monument will investigate and accept the Gospel message as I have done, as it is the most precious thing to receive.
In addition to the Hill Cumorah Monument, Torleif Knaphus worked on many other projects for the Church—some very well known, others not so well known. Included here are a few of those pieces.
THE GEOLGIC HISTORY OF HILL CUMORAH

MICHAEL J. DORAIS
Cumorah: the very mention of the name brings multiple images to the minds of Latter-day Saints. We commonly think of the coming forth of the golden plates under the direction of the angel Moroni and of the faithfulness of the Prophet Joseph Smith in fulfilling his mission. We may also think of the preparation of the plates themselves, from Nephi’s making a second set of plates, whose ultimate purposes he knew not, to Moroni’s final words engraved on that sacred record before he placed it in the Hill Cumorah. The preparation of the Smith family may come to mind as well, such as the fact that Joseph was born of righteous parents and thus was spiritually prepared to become the prophet of the restoration. Perhaps less thought goes to the climatic and financial difficulties that the Smith family experienced while living in New England, prompting them to move to New York in proximity to Cumorah, where a new dispensation would dawn.

But what of Hill Cumorah itself? The Lord in his foreknowledge knew that this hill would be the depository of the plates. What geologic processes occurred to form the hill and surrounding lands that would be attractive to the Smiths and other settlers in the early 19th century? Why was it a suitable location for storing the golden plates for hundreds of years until the stone box that contained them was first opened by the boy prophet? A look at the geologic history of the Hill Cumorah affords answers to these questions.

Setting of Hill Cumorah

Cumorah is perhaps the most famous drumlin in the world, other than Breed’s Hill, where the Battle of Bunker Hill took place during the American Revolutionary War. A drumlin, after the Gaelic word *druim* for hill, is an elongated hill formed by glacial processes. Cumorah is one of 10,000 similar hills of west-central New York that compose one of the largest drumlin fields in the world (see fig. 1). The field defines an east-west trending belt about 35 miles wide bordering the south side of Lake Ontario and extends for about 140 miles from Syracuse to the Niagara River. In order to understand the processes that formed Hill Cumorah, a brief explanation of the causes of continental glaciation, the extent of Pleistocene glaciation, and the geomorphological evidence of glaciation in the Palmyra region of New York is in order.
Causes of Glaciation

The geologic record preserves evidence of many glacial advances and retreats during the last billion years of the earth’s history. However, these glaciation events are somewhat unusual in that conditions conducive to widespread glaciation occurred only during specific times: the late Proterozoic (ca. 800 to 600 million years ago), the Pennsylvanian and Permian (ca. 350 to 250 million years ago), and the late Neogene to Quaternary (the last 4 million years).\(^3\) Within each of these major periods, many short-term fluctuations occurred in which ice sheets and glaciers repeatedly advanced and retreated. The causes, while not completely understood, are com-
monly linked to astronomical factors that influence the intensity of radiation from the sun. These factors include changes in shape of the earth’s orbital path, the precession of the equinoxes, and changes in inclination of the earth’s axis. The combination of these factors is thought to generate climatic conditions that occur with a cycle of approximately 40,000 years.

However, the major periods of widespread glaciation have not occurred on a cyclical 40,000-year basis throughout the earth’s history but are mainly limited to the Late Proterozoic, Pennsylvanian-Permian, and Neogene-Quaternary events mentioned above. Thus other factors must also play a role in the establishment of glacial conditions. Some of these events include the distribution of land masses, the opening or closing of straits, oceanic circulation patterns, the abundance of volcanic eruptions, and changes in global relief. For example, the uplift of mountains creates high-altitude conditions more suitable to enhanced snow precipitation. Ocean circulation patterns may play a major role in the distribution of equatorial heat. When the polar regions were occupied by broad, open oceans, major oceanic currents would have mixed with equatorial waters and warmed the polar oceans. This seems to have been the condition throughout most of geologic history. At times when the poles were occupied by large conti-

nents (such as the current position of Antarctica) or by restricted, landlocked oceanic basins (such as the present configuration of the Arctic Ocean), conditions were favorable and, coupled with the astronomical factors, contributed to icehouse conditions and widespread glaciation.

During periods when all of the above factors, or at least the necessary combination of the essential factors, caused global cooling, snow began to accumulate in the northern latitudes to the extent that vast glaciers covering huge land areas formed and began to flow across the northern regions of North America (glaciers formed in Europe and elsewhere as well).

**Definition and Types of Glaciers**

Glaciers are bodies of ice that are massive enough to flow under their own weight. They occur in regions where the input from winter snowfall exceeds what melts during the summer. Present-day sites of glacial formation occur only at high latitudes or high elevations, but such was not the situation during the relatively recent geologic past.

Freshly fallen snow contains about 80 percent air among 20 percent ice crystals. The snow compacts as it is compressed by additional snowfall and partial melting. Over time, the snow becomes denser and contains an ever-decreasing amount of pore space for air as the grains become rounded and compacted. By the end of winter, old snow may have a porosity of about 50 percent. *Firn*, from a German word meaning “anything related to last year,” or in this usage “last year’s snow,” is even more granular and rounded, with a porosity of 20–30 percent. Deeply buried firn is further compacted and is transformed to glacial ice with less than 20 percent pore space. When accumulated snow and ice reach a thickness of about 130 feet, the ice is able to flow under its own weight even though it remains in the solid state.

Glaciers that form in mountains are called *alpine* or *valley glaciers*. These are rivers of moving ice that flow downhill. Once melted, they leave

![Figure 3](image_url). This Greenland ice sheet resembles the ice sheet that once lay across the northeastern corridor of the United States and created an extensive drumlin field. Photo courtesy of Peter G. Knight.
behind eroded U-shaped valleys such as those of Yosemite Valley (in California’s Sierra Nevada) and those of Little Cottonwood Canyon (in Utah’s Wasatch Range). Other glaciers form ice sheets that are not confined to mountain valleys but cover large areas of thousands of square miles. The immense size of these glaciers is indicated by the name continental glaciers. There are currently two continental glaciers remaining on Earth, covering much of Greenland and Antarctica. These glaciers approach 10,000 feet in thickness and continually flow away from the main accumulation areas, much like pancake batter flows across a pan as additional batter is poured in the center of the pancake. A glacier of immense size, named the Laurentide Ice Sheet, was centered on Hudson Bay in Canada and flowed over large portions of North America. It was most extensive around 21,000 years ago, when glaciers covered most of Canada and much of the northern United States (see fig. 2).

When the input of snow to a glacier matches the output by melting and sublimation, the glacier’s margin, or edge, remains stationary. In spite of the stationary margin, however, the ice is constantly flowing toward the margins, with the rate of melting being matched by the flow. When the rate of input is greater than that of melting, the mass of the glacier increases and the glacier advances over larger areas. Conversely, when the rate of input is less than that of melting, the mass of the glacier shrinks in size, even though the ice still continually flows toward the margins.

This constant movement of ice hundreds to thousands of feet thick gives a glacier an enormous capacity to erode the bedrock over which it flows. Erosion is mainly accomplished by plucking, as blocks of bedrock are removed along joints and fractures by the flowing ice, and by abrasion, which results in a tremendous amount of material being transported by continental glaciers, mainly in the lower portions of the continental ice sheet. Some of this eroded material, called drift, is smeared below the glacial ice, but most is transported within or on the ice sheet to be dumped at the margin of the glacier in a similar manner to material being dropped at the edge of a conveyor belt. Accumulations of this marginal material, or end moraines, mark the extent of glaciation. Moraines occur south of the Hill Cumorah region, indicating that western New York was once completely covered by the Laurentide glacial sheet.

**Origin and Characteristics of Drumlins and Hill Cumorah**

A type of drift deposited by continental glaciers, drumlins are not uniformly distributed under continental glaciers but form in distinct areas called drumlin swarms or fields (see fig. 1). Although their dimensions vary, drumlins are elongated, tapered hills that range from one-half to three-quarters of a mile in length, are about a quarter of a mile wide, and rise approximately 100 to 150 feet above the surrounding lowlands. In profile, they resemble inverted spoons with the shallow lee slope pointing in the direction of ice flow (see fig. 4). The aspect ratios of drumlins are thought to reflect the speed of the glacier that produced them. That is, narrower and longer drumlins may indicate faster glacial movements than wider, shorter ones.
Because the formation of drumlins is a process that occurs under glaciers and is unobservable, the origin of drumlins has been a controversial topic. One theory is that because some drumlins contain stratified sands and gravels similar to those deposited by streams, the drumlins are water deposits. Subglacial flooding is thought to carry immense volumes of floodwater and sediment in cavities between the glacier and its underlying rock and sediment bed. Another theory is that because other drumlins are not stratified but consist of till, a poorly sorted sediment deposited by glaciers, drumlins are the result of a deformable layer of sediment between the glacier and bedrock. The sediment layer that forms drumlins is shaped by pressure exerted by the mass of the overlying glacier, with the sediment migrating to lower pressure regions under the ice sheet.

Beginning about 19,000 years ago, when the Laurentide Ice Sheet began to melt at a faster rate than snow accumulated at its source, the margin of the glacier retreated, disappearing entirely from the Palmyra area around 12,000 years ago. As the ice retreated, glacial features that had formed below the ice sheet were exposed, including the large drumlin fields of west-central New York.

Hill Cumorah is typical of the drumlins of this region, being 1.7 miles long and 0.4 miles wide and attaining a height of 140 feet above the lowland topography. The hill is also typical because its elongated profile is shaped like an inverted spoon with one end of the hill being steeper (the location of the Angel Moroni Monument and the pageant) and the other tapering off at a shallower angle (see fig. 6). Perpendicular to its length, the hill has a cross-sectional profile common to drumlins, namely, a wide base of several hundred feet and a narrow summit, especially at the northern end where it narrows to less than 20 feet.

Drumlins are composed of a variety of materials including mixtures of till, sand, and gravel. Most of these materials have high porosity and permeability, which, combined with the slope of the hill, would have allowed efficient water drainage that could have been important in the preservation of the plates, Urim and Thummim, Laban’s sword, and the Liahona over the centuries after their deposition in the stone box by Moroni.

The tills and outwash deposits from the ice sheet at Palmyra are excellent sources of sand and
gravel and are well suited for agriculture. It was these fertile soils that attracted the Smiths and other early agriculturally minded settlers. Indeed, had glaciation and till deposition not produced good farmlands in western New York, the Smiths might not have migrated there, and the restoration of the gospel might have commenced elsewhere. We readily recognize that the religious freedoms provided by the Constitution of the United States, coupled with the religious fervor that swept western New York in the early 1800s, were essential to providing the political and cultural conditions necessary for the restoration of the gospel. But it was the development of the appropriate climate and agricultural conditions of western New York by glaciation and till deposition that brought the Smiths to Palmyra. Once the family was there, the unique political and cultural conditions provided the appropriate setting for the boy prophet to begin his divinely appointed mission. While it is faith promoting to see the Lord’s foresight in the preparation and preservation of the plates, it is also faith promoting to see an even greater foreknowledge of the Lord throughout the thousands of years of geologic history that led to the formation of Hill Cumorah and the surrounding lands. For he who has seen “the least of these hath seen God moving in his majesty and power” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:47).
Moroni Delivering the Golden Plates, by Gary Kapp.

Opposite: Joseph Smith Lifting the Rock Revealing Gold Plates, by Dale Kilbourn. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.
We await answers for most questions evoked by this miracle of divinely supervised archaeological toil. What we do know is that Joseph Smith Jr. found the golden plates and other relics in a stone box in a hill near his home, a prominence now known as Cumorah. And as many believe, Cumorah was also the place of the final battles described in the Book of Mormon that destroyed the Nephites and, centuries earlier, the Jaredites. If any place merits archaeological attention, it is Cumorah. The very word elicits a series of empirical questions that can only be addressed through archaeology.

Things are rarely as simple as labels make them appear. For the past 50 years, some scholars have suggested that common Latter-day Saint usage of Cumorah confuses two different places and that the modest hill where Joseph Smith recovered the plates is not the eminence of the genocidal battles. Further, the Cumorah battlefield is seen by many scholars as the key for identifying the location of the ancient lands described in the book. Hence, much rests on its correct placement. All these observations lead to a paradox explored here: before archaeology can reveal Cumorah’s secrets, it must first be employed to identify its location. The hill the plates came from is not at issue; the question is whether this final resting place is the same hill where the ending battles occurred. Many serious scholars have attempted to prove that the Palmyra hill was the battle hill, but to little avail, largely because they do not understand archaeology as an inexact science. They argue that the Palmyra hill and its surrounding area once had tons of convincing evidence that has long since been destroyed or carted away.

Most proposals for the location of Mormon’s final stand fall into one of two possibilities: either the Palmyra hill or one in Middle America 2,000 miles to the south. Here I consider reasons for questioning the case for a New York location. I am unaware of any archaeological investigation of the hill itself, but sufficient information is available for the surrounding regions to make a critical assessment. Mormon’s hill and Moroni’s hill are not one and the same.

What does archaeology reveal about the immediate environs of the New York hill? Is there evidence of habitation by the millions involved in the final battles? Did ancient fortifications ever stand on the Palmyra hill? Currently, few general works
on the archaeology of Pennsylvania or New York exist, so serious students must consult local histories, articles, and technical reports for details. These are particularly difficult to read and interpret. There is one old but excellent source for New York compiled by E. G. Squier in 1851.¹ Another, which is almost 40 years old, was written by William A. Ritchie and most recently revised in 1994.² Overall, the paucity of published sources and archaeological projects in western New York reflects a lack of interest in this region by the archaeological community. Perhaps one reason for the meager treatment and low interest is that the archaeology of this region for ancient time periods is relatively dull compared to that of adjacent regions to the south and west. This circumstance is rather telling and involves considerable irony because western New York was one of the first regions to receive archaeological attention in the early 1800s, the time of the Smiths’ residence there.

Early settlers’ accounts of upstate New York describe numerous trenched and walled fortifications, weapons, and mass graves of disorderly bones—the latter presumably casualties of war. However, not all is as it seemed. One of the interpretive challenges is that apparently much of the evidence either has been destroyed or would not have survived normal processes of decay to the present day. In addition, it is possible that much of the evidence for early fortifications, battlefields, weapons, and war dead was destroyed when the lands in question were brought under cultivation. The plow destroys the sword in this case. Possibilities and probabilities of destroyed evidence have become an excuse for avoiding serious archaeological research altogether. But the early reports, which give glowing accounts of wonderful finds—and of the destruction of the sites from which they came—can only be considered as hearsay. William Ritchie’s work is telling. He provides a complete archaeological sequence for New York, with nothing missing. He relies on acceptable techniques of dating materials through radiocarbon and through changes in artifact styles. For our interests, Ritchie’s account shows that the Nephite-equivalent period in New York is one of relatively low population. Subsequent research in New York and adjacent regions is substantiating the historic patterns described by Ritchie.³ Sites dating to Nephite times are represented in Ritchie’s work, but there are not that many of them, and they are unimpressive. His findings do not support expectations derived from the Book of Mormon.

What about site destruction? Can we account for the discrepancies in the number and size of sites reported for New York and our expectations from the Book of Mormon account by considering how many were plowed under? No. In practical terms, the only way buried sites can be found is when they are partially destroyed during normal urban or rural activities, such as a sewer line encountering burials in downtown Salt Lake City. Archaeologists are drawn to land disturbance like moths to a light because they have a chance to
view what is beneath the surface without digging blindly. Opinions among archaeologists on the benefits of destruction, such as those voiced by Squier in the opening lines of his early study on fortifications in western New York, are not uncommon:

The Indian tribes found in possession of the country now embraced within the limits of New England and the Middle States have left few monuments to attest their former presence. The fragile structures which they erected for protection and defense have long ago crumbled to the earth; and the sites of their ancient towns and villages are indicated only by the ashes of their long-extinguished fires, and by the few rude relics which the plough of the invader exposes to his curious gaze. Their cemeteries, marked in very rare instances by enduring monuments, are now undistinguishable, except where the hand of modern improvement encroaches upon the sanctity of the grave.⁴

True, many features of these sites, such as posthole patterns and earth embankments, can eventually become too scrambled to detect. But evidence of the site will not vanish. The issue here is of visibility vis-à-vis site disturbance. Those who have collected arrowheads know that the best places to look are plowed fields, erosion channels, and other sites where surface vegetation is removed and where subsurface deposits are exposed or churned to the surface. The same principle applies to site visibility. Weekend collectors and pothunters tend to preserve and display in collections the artifacts they find. Such artifacts are removed from sites but not from sight—quite the opposite. In his study of New York, Ritchie makes frequent use of observations from private collections.

Naturally, one should not expect silk, linen, roast beef, perfume, honey, feathers, or lemonade—or the like—to survive long in the archaeological record under New York conditions. In turn, stone, bone, gold, copper, and shell survive under most conditions. Turning to the Book of Mormon, given the cultural features and events described in the record, what kinds of archaeological evidence would be preserved? What things were made of stone, shell, wood, gold, or cement? And where should we find them on the Book of Mormon landscape, and for what time periods? Perhaps significantly, the archaeological record of New York is full of evidence for wooden structures, so claiming that buildings were of wood and would leave no traces is a poor argument. Of course, most of the evidence consists only of floor plans as marked by postholes of ancient buildings rather than their superstructures. It is always possible that many sites have not been discovered because they have not had the dubious fortune of being partially destroyed. No archaeological record is completely known, so there are always sites, or features at known sites, yet to be discovered. An important concern in dealing with an archaeological record is its representativeness. Do sites of the various periods have an equal chance of coming to the attention of the archaeological community or of being reported in print? Clearly not. Archaeological

⁴ Excerpts from Squier’s Antiquities of the State of New York highlighting ancient settlements.
reporting is biased to archaeological visibility. Large sites are easier to find than small ones, and most mound sites are easier to identify than non-mound sites. Sites with pottery and chipped stone are easier to find than those without such diagnostic artifacts. Sites with exotic artifacts and burials are reported more rapidly and frequently than those without. Sites in areas of frequent human activity are easier to find than those in remote places; thus, sites located in valleys, along river floodplains, on lakeshores, or on tilled land are easier to find because of increased human disturbance. Knowing these things, one can compensate for underrepresentation of some sites by assessing the ebb and flow of regional histories. Most places within the continental United States, however, have now had sufficient archaeological activity that the basic outlines of prehistory are known. Future efforts will be directed to filling in details and making minor adjustments. In short, what we see in the New York archaeological record is probably a representative sample of what once existed there.

I am not an expert on New York archaeology, nor am I likely to be, but I took a few hours to peruse some of the literature and learned that the general course of prehistory outlined for New York fits comfortably and logically with the histories of adjacent regions and that it makes good anthropological sense. The inferences made from archaeological observations appear reasonably supported by known facts. When we pay attention to time and to cultural context, it becomes clear that the events described in the Book of Mormon did not occur in New York.

The Book of Mormon makes hundreds of clear cultural and chronological claims. Here it will suffice to touch on just a few principal ones. The dates inserted at the bottom of each page of the modern publication of the Book of Mormon provide the needed chronological frame. As to cultural practices, the Book of Mormon describes for all its peoples, even the Lamanites, a sedentary lifestyle based on cereal agriculture, with cities and substantial buildings. Thus, we should be looking for evidence of city dwellers, permanent populations, kings, farmers, and grains, among other things. These should start in the third millennium before Christ and persist at least until the fourth century after his death. There should be some climax and nadir moments in developments and demography, and these should occur in specific places on the landscape. New York lacked cities and cereal agriculture until after AD 1000 and is thus not the place where the events described in the Book of Mormon took place. We are not missing archaeological evidence of indigenous peoples, their settlement patterns, or subsistence practices for the time periods under consideration. These are reasonably well known for each period from a variety of evidence, and they simply do not fit the requirements specified in the Book of Mormon.⁵

The largest Nephite cities and towns of the Book of Mormon narrative were located in valley settings, necessarily in areas with good agricultural land. Some areas were occupied for centuries and experienced periodic building and rebuilding. Some had temples and other religious structures, walls, gates, and dwellings. In archaeological terms, these sites should be spatially extensive and thick, with significant stratigraphy. These are the types of archaeological sites with the highest potential for visibility and the greatest probability of being located and consistently reported. We would not expect evidence of their size or date to be annihilated, even with several centuries of plowing. Rather, such activity would make them easier to find—more visible. They should have been part of the early settlers’ descriptions. New York and Pennsylvania lack sites that fit this description. Finding a 2,000- to 4,000-year-old city in New York State would be so novel that it would be reported quickly in all scientific outlets. It has never happened, and it will not happen. The most likely locations for such cities are already archaeologically well known because they are also the prime locations for modern occupation.

The archaeology of the midcontinental and northeastern United States covers a long time period. The Book of Mormon time period corresponds to the archaeological phases of the Late Archaic (Jaredite), Adena (Jaredite and Nephite), and Hopewell (Nephite) periods. But evidence of prehistoric occupation at the right time is not the same as evidence of occupation by Book of Mormon peoples and their civilizations. Civilization is a technical term with a special meaning in archaeology, usually meaning societies complex enough to have lived in cities and to have been ruled by kings—a basic requirement that matches the Book of Mormon.

The term civilization is an appropriate interpretation of the text but not for northeastern U.S. archaeology. For this area, the Adena and Hopewell
cultures are particularly attractive candidates for Book of Mormon peoples because they represented the most sophisticated cultures on their time horizon in the United States. They were the first cultures in this area to build burial mounds and mound enclosures, they engaged in long-distance trade, and they fabricated artistic items that they buried with select individuals. According to reports, some individuals were buried with thousands of pearls. Adena and Hopewell peoples lived in Pennsylvania and western New York, but this region represented the impoverished fringe of their culture.

What is the basic cultural sequence for this region? I take the following succinct summary statements of cultural periods and their typical cultural practices from a masterwork on Pennsylvania archaeology:

- Archaic period (7000–1000 BC): “Bands of hunters and gatherers, following patterns of restricted seasonal wandering.”
- Transitional period (1800–800 BC): “Far-ranging bands of hunters and gatherers, occupying temporary hamlets; heavy dependence on riverine resources.”
- Early Woodland (1000–300 BC): “Bands of family units living in scattered households; persistence of hunting and gathering, with a possible shift in some areas to semi-sedentary settlement due to a more stable economic base.”
- Middle Woodland (500 BC–AD 1000): “Incipient tribal village life in western Pa. [Pennsylvania], supported by horticulture, hunting and gathering; bands in eastern Pa. living in scattered hamlets, practicing hunting and gathering.”
- Late Woodland (AD 1000–1550): “Seasonally sedentary tribes; villages and hamlets (some stockaded villages); horticulture, hunting and gathering.”

For the nearby Genesee Valley in New York, Neal L. Trubowitz gives detailed information from an intensive survey carried out in conjunction with the construction of a recent highway. For the wide strip of land involved, there is 100 percent coverage, so the information for relative changes in occupation is unusually good, as such things go in archaeology. Trubowitz’s information is more recent than Ritchie’s summary.

Hunting and gathering as a way of life continued into the Early Woodland Period [1000–300 BC], with land use still centered on the valley slope above the Genesee-Canaseraga junction as in the previous period. Very few data have been found on flood plain or lake plain sites during this time period. There are a number of camps recorded for the upland, though the site density there is still the lowest. The population probably remained stable. . . . The basic stability in lifestyle continued despite the adoption of new technology (including ceramic pots and smoking pipes) and ideology (as seen in the elaboration of mortuary ceremonialism of the Middlesex and Meadowood phases in line with influences reaching the Genesee Valley from the Adena Tradition heartland in Ohio).

This pattern continued and intensified during the following Middle Woodland Period [500 BC–AD 1000]. Subsistence of the Point Peninsula Tradition was still based on hunting and gathering, and mortuary ceremonialism reached its fullest expression in exotic grave goods left in burial mounds of the Squawkie Hill phase, patterned after those found in Ohio (Hopewell Tradition). Verified mound sites are all on the valley slope overlooking the flood plain, as is often the case for contemporary mounds found in the Illinois and Ohio Valleys. Although only one site was found on the lake plain in the highway sample, others did exist in the lower Genesee River basin. . . . Point Peninsula site density was greatest on the flood plain as opposed to the valley slope. This could show a shift in subsistence focus, but small sample size may be a controlling factor here. However, the number of known sites and total site density drops from the Early Woodland Meadowood and Middlesex phases to the Point Peninsula Tradition and Squawkie Hill phase. This implies that a population decline took place during the Middle Woodland Period.

These findings support Ritchie’s earlier reports for New York. The population of the Genesee Valley was always small and dispersed in small bands. The food quest involved hunting and gathering of wild plants, fruits, nuts, and berries. During the key time period (ca. AD 100–400), the Genesee Valley suffered a decline in an already sparse population. No large sites are found here for any time period. Corn agriculture did not become a significant factor here or elsewhere in the midcontinental or the southeastern United States until after AD 1000. With the commitment to corn agriculture, population and
village sizes increased, and so did tensions. All the known fortified sites and villages in New York date to the latest time period, the Late Woodland (AD 1000–1550). Clearly there were many settlements, and reports of them go back to the beginning of colonization, with the best report being Squier’s 1851 study, complete with maps. It bears emphasizing that these fortified knolls and spurs were all quite small and would have accommodated only about 100 to 400 people each. They really do not fit large populations, even if they were of the right period. Fortifications are found associated with mass graves and large storage pits, some of which still have evidence of stored maize. These are all known features of late occupation. The archaeology of western New York forms a long record of small bands of hunters and gatherers (berry eaters) who lived there for millennia. The record is clear, and I accept it as it stands.

In summary, the archaeology of New York is persuasive evidence that Book of Mormon peoples did not live in that region. By implication, the Cumorah of the golden plates is not the Cumorah of the final battles. These conclusions follow from a few basic points and assumptions. First, I presume that the archaeology of New York State, as currently published (2004), is a fair representation and adequate sample of what is there, and particularly that the evidence for some periods has not been systematically destroyed. Second, I presume that the evidence published for the various regions and time periods is accurate—that is, that the majority of archaeologists working in this region are competent and academically honest in terms of their archaeology. Third, I assume that additional research and discoveries will not significantly alter current understandings of the times or places of prehistoric occupation nor of the cultural practices involved; rather, such data will lead to minor adjustments to some of the details of prehistory. Fourth, the archaeological record lacks evidence for cities, sedentism, corn agriculture, fortifications, and dense populations during Archaic, Early Woodland, and Middle Woodland times. In accord with these general observations about New York and Pennsylvania, we come to our principal object—the Hill Cumorah. Archaeologically speaking, it is a clean hill. No artifacts, no walls, no trenches, no arrowheads. The area immediately surrounding the hill is similarly clean. Pre-Columbian people did not settle or build here. This is not the place of Mormon’s last stand. We must look elsewhere for that hill.¹¹ The Palmyra hill is still a sacred place and was the repository of the golden plates and other relics placed there by Moroni. How Moroni made his way to this place and constructed his time capsule of artifacts is a historic adventure for another time.
Pairs and Merisms in 3 Nephi

Cynthia L. Hallen with Josh Sorenson and ELANG 324 students

James T. Duke’s recent Journal of Book of Mormon Studies article on “Word Pairs and Distinctive Combinations in the Book of Mormon”¹ invites us to ponder “the deeper meanings” of word pairs that appear in two syntactic forms: parallel structures and conjoined pairs. In my History of the English Language course at Brigham Young University, I invited students to focus attention specifically on conjoined word pairs in the scriptures. They searched for pairs of words linked with conjunctions (and, or, nor) in order to better understand the meaning of selected set expressions in the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon. They also analyzed the meaning of the pairs according to semantic relations such as synonyms, antonyms, and complements. These terms are defined and exemplified in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synonyms</td>
<td>Pairs of words that have the same or similar meanings: faithful and true, evil and wicked, firm and steadfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonyms</td>
<td>Pairs of words that have antithetical or contradictory meanings: good and evil, righteous and wicked, true and false</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complements</td>
<td>Pairs of words that have distinct yet reciprocal meanings: kings and queens, silver and gold, bows and arrows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pairs of synonyms often have the effect of emphasis, so that faithful and true can mean “very faithful.” Pairs of antonyms often create antithesis, so that the word good is the categorical opposite of the word evil. Complementary pairs are often related by contiguity; bows are not the same as arrows, but they go together as a set.

For the first part of his term project, Josh Sorenson tabulated students’ findings to assist me with research for this study. I have examined his tables and added commentary from my research on the pairs that students identified. In the Old Testament, Katie Sorensen identified the complementary pair male and female in Genesis 1:27. Both elements of the pair came into Middle English from early French. According to Strong’s dictionary in the electronic edition of the Latter-day Saint scriptures,² the word male is a translation of the transliterated Hebrew root zkhr, meaning “marked, remembered, male.” The word female is a translation of the transliterated Hebrew root nqbh, meaning “perforated, designated, female.” Although the meanings of the elements male and female are complementary rather than synonymous, both have their semantic roots in the marking of domestic animals in order to distinguish them as part of one’s flock.

In the New Testament, Brian McMillan found the synonymous pair holiness and righteousness in the prophecy of Zacharias (Luke 1:75). Both elements of the pair have their modern English roots in Old English. According to Strong’s dictionary, the word holiness is a translation of the transliterated Greek root hósios, which includes connotations such as “piety” and “right.” The word righteousness is a translation of the transliterated Greek root dikaios, which includes connotations such as “equity,” “justification,” and “holy.” Since holiness includes the sense of “right,” and righteousness includes the sense of “holy,” we can label the elements of this pair as synonyms.

The next table contains Book of Mormon pairs that Sarah Swank gathered from Lehi’s vision in 1 Nephi 8. Column 1 gives the scriptural reference; column 2, the elements of the pair; column 3, the part of speech of the conjoined lexical items; and column 4, the semantic relationship between the...
elements. The semantic classification of pairs can be ambiguous and overlapping. For example, the pair *dark and dreary* in 1 Nephi 8:4 comes from two Old English roots that mean “without light” and “bloody,” so they could constitute a pair of complements as well as synonyms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 8:4, 7 dark and dreary</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>synonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 8:9, 20 large and spacious</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>synonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 8:20 strait and narrow</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>synonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 8:26, 31 great and spacious</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>synonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 8:27 old and young</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>antonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 8:36 dream or vision</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>synonyms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pair from 1 Nephi 8:36 occurs near the end of the chapter when Nephi writes, “After my father had spoken all the words of his *dream or vision* . . .” This pair seems to be an echo of Lehi’s words at the beginning of chapter 8, “Behold, I have *dreamed a dream*; or, in other words, I have *seen a vision*” (v. 2). The synonymy of the pair is supported by parallel structures and Hebrew roots in other scriptural cross-references. Conjoining *dream* with *vision* into a pair seems to be an ellipsis (reduction) of larger parallel syntactic structures found in Numbers 12:6, Job 7:14, Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17, and 1 Nephi 1:16. In other words, many of the conjoined pairs that we can identify as rhetorical figures in scriptural texts seem to be abridgments of larger syntactic units. Perhaps such larger structures became so common or familiar that they were clipped into shorter idiomatic expressions, standing as telegraphic placeholders for richer meanings.

Book of Mormon pairs from 1 Nephi 14 that Sarah Haskew identified and labeled are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Antonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 14:3, 9, 15, 17 great and abominable</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>complements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 14:4 wickedness and abomination</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>complements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 14:7 temporally and spiritually</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>antonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 14:23 plain and pure</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>complements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1 Nephi 14:23, Nephi uses the phrase *plain and pure* with two other pairs to describe the revelations of the apostle John:

Wherefore, the things which he shall write are *just and true*; and behold they are written in the book which thou beheld proceeding out of the mouth of the Jew; and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or, at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were *plain and pure*, and most *precious and easy* to the understanding of all men.

Although the words *plain and pure* could be synonyms, an examination of the corresponding terms in the Hebrew Old Testament suggests that the underlying meanings may be different but complementary, as Sarah indicated. The transliterated Hebrew word *nākoah* means “straightforward, equitable, correct, right” in Proverbs 8:8–9: “the words of my mouth . . . are all *plain* to him that understandeth.” On the other hand, the transliterated Hebrew word *ṭāhōr* means “clean, fair, bright, sound, clear, uncontaminated” in Psalm 12:6: “The words of the Lord are *pure* words.” Although it occurs only once in the standard works, the pair *plain and pure* seems to be a shorter representation of more extensive expressions found in other passages of scripture.

Stanley Thayne found pairs in 2 Nephi 2, a chapter famous for complementary and antithetical concepts that illustrate Lehi’s teaching that “there is an opposition in all things” (v. 11):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Antonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 2:10 truth and holiness</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>complements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 2:11 holiness nor misery</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>antonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 2:11 good nor bad</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>antonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 2:14 profit and learning</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>complements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 2:14 heavens and earth</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>antonyms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the phrase *the heavens and the earth* may be read as a pair of antonyms with contradictory meanings, a careful reading of 2 Nephi 2:14 suggests that the words may be complementary rather than antithetical. The words *heavens* and *earth* have a contiguous relationship that can represent the entire universe with everything and everyone in it:

And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both *the heavens and the earth*, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon.
In fact, the Old Testament begins with the same complementary pair that Lehi uses in his sermon: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (Genesis 2:1).

For the second part of his term project, Josh Sorenson created a preliminary inventory of word pairs in 3 Nephi. Using his data and my own comprehensive inventory, I have examined, categorized, and cross-referenced the conjoined pairs in 3 Nephi. In addition to synonyms, antonyms, and complements, I found pairs that seem to act as merisms and hendiadys, as defined below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>merisms</th>
<th>Pairs of terms that represent a whole set of items that point to a larger totality; the blind and the deaf = {the blind, deaf, lame, mute, paralyzed, wounded, insane, diabetic, etc.} = “all who are afflicted in any way”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hendiadys</td>
<td>Pair of words in which one term acts as a modifier for the other; joy and praise = “joyful praise”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The semantic relationships between the first and second elements of each of the 132 coordinate pairs in 3 Nephi can be classified and tallied as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>28 pairs</th>
<th>4 pairs</th>
<th>42 pairs</th>
<th>42 pairs</th>
<th>16 pairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>synonyms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>antonyms</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>complements</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>merisms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hendiadys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because semantic relations can vary depending on how the scriptural context is interpreted, I was careful to ensure that, whenever possible, each word pair in my classification was supported by a cross-reference to another scripture in which the elements appear together in a pair, a series, or a parallelism of similar or identical meaning.

The following chart lists 28 synonymous pairs found in 3 Nephi:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Nephi</th>
<th>Conjoined Pairs</th>
<th>Cross-References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>signs and miracles</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 29:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>lyings and deceivings</td>
<td>Jeremiah 9:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>lead away and deceive</td>
<td>1 Nephi 16:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>foolish and vain</td>
<td>Lamentations 2:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:11</td>
<td>wars and contentions</td>
<td>Isaiah 41:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:12</td>
<td>freedom and liberty</td>
<td>Alma 43:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>leader and governor</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:2</td>
<td>right and liberty</td>
<td>Alma 43:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:13</td>
<td>flocks and herds</td>
<td>Genesis 13:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:22</td>
<td>blessed and prospered</td>
<td>Mosiah 2:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:4</td>
<td>prosper and wax great</td>
<td>Jeremiah 5:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:4</td>
<td>equity and justice</td>
<td>Proverbs 1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:20</td>
<td>sins and iniquities</td>
<td>Exodus 34:39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:28</td>
<td>given and administered</td>
<td>Moroni 10:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:19</td>
<td>devils and unclean spirits</td>
<td>Luke 9:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:25</td>
<td>witness and testimony</td>
<td>Mosiah 21:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:25</td>
<td>cry and mourn</td>
<td>Jeremiah 48:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:9</td>
<td>sins and wickedness</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 29:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:2</td>
<td>lamenting and howling</td>
<td>Jeremiah 4:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:8</td>
<td>weep and howl</td>
<td>James 5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>praise and thanksgiving</td>
<td>Nehemiah 12:46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:13</td>
<td>sunk and buried up</td>
<td>3 Nephi 9:6, 9:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:14</td>
<td>see and behold</td>
<td>Judges 21:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:1</td>
<td>marveling and wondering</td>
<td>3 Nephi 15:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:32</td>
<td>return and repent</td>
<td>Joel 2:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24:16</td>
<td>hearkened and heard</td>
<td>Isaiah 42:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25:4</td>
<td>statutes and judgments</td>
<td>Leviticus 18:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30:2</td>
<td>lyings and deceivings</td>
<td>Psalm 120:2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 3 Nephi 2:2, a foolish and a vain thing resembles and reverses a phrase in Lamentations 2:14, “Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee.” The phrase wars and contentions in 3 Nephi 2:11 has a counterpart in the parallelism of Isaiah 41:12:

Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee:
they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought.

The synonymy of the pair lyings and deceivings in 3 Nephi 1:22 and 30:2 is supported by parallel structures in Jeremiah 9:5:

they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth:
they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.

Some may wonder why a speaker or writer would deliberately choose the redundancy of a pair of synonyms. Such repetition can enhance memory, add emphasis to important concepts, or intensify emotion in significant messages.

The following table shows four pairs of antonyms in 3 Nephi whose semantic relationship consists of words that have antithetical or contradictory meanings:
The contrast between the words righteous and wicked in 3 Nephi 24:18 (see Malachi 3:18) appears in at least 100 other scripture references. One example is found in Ecclesiastes 3:17, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.” In Strong’s dictionary, the transliterated Hebrew root for righteous is tsdhq, meaning “just, lawful, righteous, morally clean.” The root for wicked is rsh, meaning “bad, guilty, ungodly, morally wrong.” The antithetical contrast is obvious.

The next table shows 42 pairs of words in 3 Nephi whose semantic relationship is neither synonymous nor antithetical but complementary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Nephi</th>
<th>Conjoined Pairs</th>
<th>Cross-References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:14</td>
<td>Father and Son</td>
<td>Matthew 28:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:18</td>
<td>iniquity and unbelief</td>
<td>Alma 45:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:29</td>
<td>lyings and flattering words</td>
<td>Proverbs 26:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:10</td>
<td>preaching and prophesying</td>
<td>Nehemiah 6:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:11</td>
<td>death and carnage</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:16</td>
<td>young men and daughters</td>
<td>Jeremiah 11:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:12</td>
<td>demands and threatenings</td>
<td>3 Nephi 3:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:14</td>
<td>day and night</td>
<td>Genesis 8:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:12</td>
<td>threatenings and oaths</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:14</td>
<td>stood and fought</td>
<td>Mormon 2:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:14</td>
<td>overtaken and slain</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 19:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:33</td>
<td>repentance and humility</td>
<td>Helaman 11:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:5</td>
<td>condemned and punished</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:10</td>
<td>pride and boastings</td>
<td>Helaman 12:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:13</td>
<td>railing and persecution</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:13</td>
<td>humble and penitent</td>
<td>Alma 27:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:20</td>
<td>preaching and testifying</td>
<td>Acts 8:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:27</td>
<td>friends and kindreds</td>
<td>Alma 10:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>law and rights</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:21</td>
<td>power and Spirit</td>
<td>Luke 1:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>sicknesses and infirmities</td>
<td>Matthew 8:17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The complementary words iniquity and unbelief make a pair unique to the Book of Mormon. In English etymology, the Latin roots of the word iniquity mean “not + equitable,” whereas the Germanic roots of unbelief mean “not + loving.” The negated items in the pair exemplify the rhetorical figure litotes, as in the advertisement that portrays Seven-Up as the “Un-Cola.” Instead of saying “their sins and their doubts,” 3 Nephi 1:18 uses a pair of two negated forms: “they began to fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief.” Future studies of word pairs in the Book of Mormon could include a thorough search for such rhetorical figures and forms.

Merisms may be seen as a special kind of complementary pair with an expanded scope. Calvert Watkins explains the function of merisms as metonymic connectors in an “A, B : C” formula. The specific A and B elements refer to a set of subordinate items (hyponyms) that refer to C, a more general “totality of notion.”¹³ Not only do merisms appear as textual figures in the Indo-European family of languages, of which English is a member, but they are also a part of the Afro-Asiatic family, or Hamito-Semitic tradition, that Hebrew, Arabic, and Egyptian belong to. This table shows 42 pairs of subordinate items in 3 Nephi whose semantic relationship constitutes a merism,
or superordinate totality. The last column suggests a larger meaning that the figure may be pointing to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Nephi</th>
<th>Conjoined Pairs</th>
<th>Cross-References</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>judge and govern</td>
<td>Daniel 3:2–3</td>
<td>leadership roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:6</td>
<td>joy and faith</td>
<td>Galatians 5:22</td>
<td>fruits of the Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>signs and wonders</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 4:34</td>
<td>extraordinary events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:25</td>
<td>jot or tittle</td>
<td>Matthew 5:18</td>
<td>scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:27</td>
<td>holds and secret places</td>
<td>Judges 6:2</td>
<td>retreats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30</td>
<td>faith and righteousness</td>
<td>1 Timothy 6:11</td>
<td>good character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>heard and seen</td>
<td>Philippians 4:9</td>
<td>perceive; experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:18</td>
<td>contentions and dissensions</td>
<td>Jarom 1:13</td>
<td>violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:19</td>
<td>revelation and prophecy</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 14:6</td>
<td>the word of the Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:2</td>
<td>beasts nor game</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>wild animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:4</td>
<td>horses and cattle</td>
<td>Exodus 9:3</td>
<td>domesticated animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:31</td>
<td>singing and praising</td>
<td>2 Samuel 22:50</td>
<td>vocal music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:18</td>
<td>just and true</td>
<td>Philippians 4:8</td>
<td>virtuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:20</td>
<td>God and Savior</td>
<td>2 Samuel 22:2</td>
<td>Deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:27</td>
<td>lawyers and high priests</td>
<td>Alma 14:18</td>
<td>governing officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:17</td>
<td>power and author- ity</td>
<td>Revelation 13:2</td>
<td>priesthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:12</td>
<td>thunderings and lightnings</td>
<td>Exodus 20:18</td>
<td>aspects of storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:25</td>
<td>killed and stoned</td>
<td>Matthew 21:35</td>
<td>taking life violently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:25</td>
<td>mothers and daughters</td>
<td>Jeremiah 16:3</td>
<td>female family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:8</td>
<td>hills and valleys</td>
<td>Ezekiel 6:3</td>
<td>geographical features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15</td>
<td>heavens and earth</td>
<td>Genesis 2:1</td>
<td>the whole universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:18</td>
<td>Alpha and Omega</td>
<td>Revelation 1:11</td>
<td>eternal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:18</td>
<td>beginning and end</td>
<td>Revelation 1:8</td>
<td>eternal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:19</td>
<td>sacrifices and burnt offerings</td>
<td>Leviticus 7:37</td>
<td>memorials to Deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:20</td>
<td>broken heart and contrite spirit</td>
<td>Psalm 34:18</td>
<td>whole soul</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The merism in 3 Nephi 1:6 of “your joy and your faith” seems to point to the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Both the pair and the list represent Christlike character as a whole. Similarly, the pair faith and righteousness in 3 Nephi 1:30 can be read as a merism. The total concept of good character is cataloged in 1 Timothy 6:11: “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (see also 2 Timothy 2:22).

Because merisms can act as both symbols and indexes, they can deliver literal and figurative meanings at the same time. The emblems of the sacrament in 3 Nephi 18:1–3 are literally “bread and wine,” symbolizing the body and blood of Christ. In addition, these elements point to a totality of sustenance and nourishment. Calvert Watkins explains that the Hittite pair grains and grapes and the Greek pair bread and wine serve as deictic expressions for...
“all agricultural products and alimentation.” Similar constructs appear in the Hebrew Old Testament (see Genesis 14:18; 1 Samuel 16:20; 2 Samuel 6:19; 16:1; 2 Kings 18:32; Isaiah 36:17). The symbols of the sacrament reveal that Christ is the sustainer of mortal life and the source of eternal life. He is the “bread of life” (John 6:35) and the “living water” (John 4:10–11); he is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Further research on word pairs in the Book of Mormon could include a look at the syntactic figure of hendiadys, a pair of conjoined words in which one element actually modifies the other grammatically. In the following table are 15 pairs of words whose syntactic elements constitute various modifier/head relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Nephi</th>
<th>Conjoined Pairs</th>
<th>Cross-References</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:3</td>
<td>wickedness and abominations</td>
<td>Ezekiel 8:9</td>
<td>wicked abominations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:12</td>
<td>church and worship</td>
<td>Alma 43:45</td>
<td>church worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10</td>
<td>lands and possessions</td>
<td>Genesis 36:43</td>
<td>land of possession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10</td>
<td>rights and government</td>
<td>3 Nephi 3:10</td>
<td>rights of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:16</td>
<td>great and marvelous</td>
<td>Revelation 15:1</td>
<td>greatly marvelous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:7</td>
<td>great and terrible</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 1:19</td>
<td>greatly terrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:20</td>
<td>death and sufferings</td>
<td>Hebrews 2:9</td>
<td>suffering of death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:3</td>
<td>chief(s) and leader(s)</td>
<td>Alma 43:44</td>
<td>chief leader(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:4</td>
<td>doubtings and disputations</td>
<td>Romans 14:1</td>
<td>doubts caused by disputations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:14</td>
<td>great and notable</td>
<td>Acts 2:20</td>
<td>very famous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:2</td>
<td>iniquity and abominations</td>
<td>Ezekiel 36:31</td>
<td>loathsome perversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:9</td>
<td>murders and combinations</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:9</td>
<td>combinations of murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:18</td>
<td>light and life</td>
<td>John 8:12</td>
<td>light of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:21</td>
<td>vengeance and fury</td>
<td>Micah 5:15</td>
<td>furious vengeance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25:5</td>
<td>great and dreadful</td>
<td>Daniel 9:4</td>
<td>very powerful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 3 Nephi 2:3, the “noun + noun” pair wickedness and abominations (see 3:11; 7:15; 9:9, 10, 11, 12; 30:2) may actually be an adjective modifying a noun as in Ezekiel 8:9, “Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here.” The pair great and marvelous events (see 3 Nephi 3:16; 5:8; 11:1; 17:16–17; 19:34; 21:9; 26:14; 28:31–32) may actually be occasions that leave us “marveling greatly” (Joseph Smith—History 1:44). Either way, the language of the Lord and his servants in the scriptures is great and marvelous. Our attention to the details of the divine dialogue will not be ignored or unrewarded!

Please send questions or comments to Cynthia_Hallen@byu.edu.
The Name *Cumorah*

Paul Y. Hoskisson

The land and the hill called Cumorah are most famous for being both the scene of the last battle between the Nephites and the Lamanites (see Mormon 6:2–11; 8:2) and the place where Mormon buried all the sacred records except the abridgment he passed to his son Moroni (see Mormon 6:6; Ether 15:11). In Jaredite times this same hill was known by the name *Ramah* and was the site where the Jaredite armies fought to their mutual destruction (see Ether 15:11). This is the same land that Limhi’s search party found and mistook for a destroyed Zarahemla (see Mosiah 8:8; 21:26) and that was later settled by Nephites (see Helaman 3:3–6). Additionally, the land of Cumorah was apparently the place where the Mulekites first landed in the Americas (see Alma 22:29–31).

The first use of the name *Cumorah* occurs late in Nephite history, just before the final destruction of the Nephites about AD 385 (see Mormon 6:2). Unlike the case of some place-names in the Book of Mormon, we are never told how the land and the hill Cumorah received this designation in the Nephite record.¹ It is possible that the Mulekites first gave the name to the land and the hill and that the name persisted through Nephite history to the end of the Nephite record. It is possible that the Mulekites first gave the name to the land and the hill and that the name persisted through Nephite history to the end of the Nephite record. It is also possible that Cumorah received its name late in Nephite history by Nephites who began settling in the area about 50 years before the birth of Christ. In either case, the first place to look for the meaning of *Cumorah* would be in Hebrew and other related Semitic languages.²

*Cumorah* lends itself to several possible etymological explanations, some of which carry a more or less appropriate meaning for the hill.³ The first possibility is that *Cumorah* is a late Nephite rendering of *Gomorrah*, the name of the twin city of Sodom.⁴ As a place that God destroyed, *Gomorrah* would be an appropriate name for the scene of the Jaredite destruction that the Mulekites encountered, that Limhi’s search party found, and that the Nephites called “desolate” (Helaman 3:6). The name was intended, perhaps, to prophetically anticipate the final battle scene between the Nephites and Lamanites. But since *Cumorah* is not exactly *Gomorrah*, either the differences between the two names must be reconciled or it must be explained why the differences do not matter.

Both the vowel and the consonant differences must be resolved. I will turn to the vowels first. The fact that *Gomorrah* is spelled with an *o* and *Cumorah* is spelled with a *u* is not consequential. The vowels *o* and *u* are very similar to each other and therefore often interchange. In fact, there is some confusion about the pronunciation of *Cumorah* in the earliest spellings, with *u* and *a* alternating (an unaccented *o* vowel is often pronounced in American English almost like an *a* vowel). The printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon has *Camorah* in Mormon 6:2, with a later correction to *Cumorah* by Oliver Cowdery, and subsequently *Cumorah* in six and *Comorah* in two of the remaining occurrences in the printer’s manuscript.⁵ The 1830 edition has *Camorah* in all nine occurrences.⁶ In spite of that, it seems to me that the current spelling, *Cumorah*, is the correct spelling.⁷

Similar confusion exists regarding the quality (length) of the first vowel in the Hebrew word *Gomorrah*. The received Hebrew text of the Bible, called the Masoretic Text, indicates a short vowel of indeterminate quality for the *o* in *Gomorrah*; that is, it could come from *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, or *u*. The Qumran Hebrew text of Isaiah 1:9 and 10 and 13:19 (1QIs⁵), however,
contains the spelling הָרָה, indicating a long vowel, either ō or ū, after the first consonant. This Qumran spelling of Gomorrah would be consistent with the Greek rendering of the first vowel as o and would not exclude the Book of Mormon spelling of Cumorah with a u. Thus, the initial-vowel difference between Gomorrah and Cumorah is not significant.

In the matter of consonants, a more technical difference between Cumorah and Gomorrah exists. As any first-year Hebrew student would object, Gomorrah in the Hebrew Bible begins not with the g of the King James Version but with an ‘ayin (an unvoiced stop that does not occur in Western European languages but that is common in all West Semitic languages), rendered ‘mrh. In addition, the r of the Masoretic Text is virtually doubled (as reflected in the KJV spelling) while the r in Cumorah is single. Indeed, it would appear to be difficult to explain how an ‘ayin could become a c. However, both of these objections are not as serious as they might appear at first.

The written letter ‘ayin in Hebrew represents two phonemes (sounds), ‘ayin and ḡayin (voiced velar fricative), both of which were represented by the single sign ḡ. The Hebrews must have preserved both phonemes (or the tradition of both phonemes) late into their history, despite having only one character to represent both. Thus, Hebrew names that originally contained the sound of a ḡayin, which had long since been spelled with the single Hebrew letter that represents both ḡayin and ‘ayin, are usually spelled with a g in the Greek transliterations of the Septuagint. With the place-name Gomorrah, the KJV follows the Greek Septuagint form of the name, spelling it with a g.

From a linguistic point of view, early Nephites might have pronounced Gomorrah with an initial ḡayin, and this pronunciation could easily have shifted during the approximate 1,000-year Nephite history to become a voiceless velar stop (hard c) by AD 380. But even if this plausible linguistic shift from ḡayin to c among Nephites did not take place, the change can be explained by the English environment of upstate New York. The Prophet Joseph did not have at his disposal a sign in the English alphabet, or even a sound, that represented a ḡayin. He would have been forced to use an approximation, and a hard c sound would not have been amiss.

The matter of the two r’s remains. Gomorrah in Hebrew is spelled with only one r. Nevertheless, it is correctly expressed in Greek (from which our KJV spelling derives) with two r’s because the r of the Hebrew Masoretic Text is, as it is expressed by Hebrew grammarians, virtually doubled. Therefore, the plates may well have contained a single sign for r and left it to the reader to double it if necessary. Additionally, even after nearly 1,000 years of Nephite history, whether there are two r’s or one in the English transcription seems inconsequential, especially if Mormon wrote a single r that may or may not have been virtually doubled in its pronunciation. Therefore, the fact that Cumorah has only one r and Gomorrah has two is not a significant problem.

Additional Etymologies

In addition to the comparison to Gomorrah, the first etymology just discussed, other etymologies of Cumorah are possible. The second possibility appears quite attractive on the surface. The Hebrew verb qūm means “to rise.” The Hebrew noun ēr means “light, flame, fire” and is the root behind the Urim of Urim and Thummim. It can also stand alone as a term for revelation, usually rendered as the plural word Urim in the King James Bible. The feminine form is ērah, meaning “light,” as in Psalm 139:12. Thus, by combining the words for “rise” and for “light,” the meaning of Cumorah could be “Rise, O Light,” a most appropriate name for a place from which the beginnings of the restoration of the gospel would figuratively, and in some senses, literally, arise.

Yet this etymology presents challenges more serious than those of equating Cumorah with Gomorrah. As noted, the -ērah part of Cumorah corresponds with the feminine form for “light,” ērah. The cum- part of Cumorah could be explained as an imperative from qūm, as I have translated it above. But qūm is the masculine imperative and would not be used in Hebrew with a feminine noun. The feminine imperative would be qūmi. Because Cumorah clearly does not exhibit the feminine form (hypothetically Cumiorah), it would be difficult to take this etymology seriously, no matter how tempting and appropriate the meaning might be.

The third possible etymology also appears at first to be promising. There is a fairly common root in widely dispersed Semitic languages, kmr. The verb can mean “to heap up,” “to heat up” or “to become excited,” to “make dates ripen in the ground,” and to “ferment.” The noun form from this root that most resembles Cumorah is the later Akkadian form.
kumāru (plural kumārātu), meaning “border(?), edge.” Notice, however, that the singular does not appear in the hypothetical feminine form kumārtu, but that the plural form is grammatically feminine. In Akkadian the verb can mean “to heap up mounds,” “to heap up corpses,” or both. Cumorah could then be a feminine form of a noun that means something like “a heap” or “mound,” meanings not altogether amiss for the nature and role of the hill Cumorah in Nephite history. And even though the Hebrew vowel patterns for feminine nouns are difficult to match up with Cumorah, it is not impossible.

Less tempting is a fourth derivation, also from a common Semitic root, kmr, which may or may not be related to the kmr just discussed. In the Hebrew Old Testament this root appears as komer, a term for an unacceptable priest (see 2 Kings 23:5; Hosea 10:5; and Zephaniah 1:4; the normal word for an acceptable priest in the Hebrew Old Testament is kōhen). Cumorah thus could represent a feminine noun from this root.

The difficulty with deriving Cumorah from a feminine form of komer lies with the second vowel of Cumorah, the o. All the cognates of komer, meaning “priest,” in the various Semitic languages are from the noun kumru. When this type of noun form appears in Hebrew, such as in komer, it is called a segholate because it has a short e vowel (called seghol in Hebrew) between the second and third consonants. This means that Hebrew komer is a segholate form. The feminine form would be komrah. Notice that this form cannot have a vowel between the second and third consonants. To illustrate in more detail how segholate forms work in Hebrew, I will use the Hebrew word for “king,” which is an analogous segholate form. The masculine singular is melek, but the feminine singular form is malkah. Therefore, if Cumorah were derived from the feminine singular form of komer, as it would need to be if we are to explain the -ah ending, it could not have the middle o vowel. In fact, the feminine singular segholate form would have no vowel at all between the second and third consonants. In other words, any attempt to derive Cumorah from the feminine form of the segholate komer fails on the grounds that the middle o vowel cannot be explained as a singular without going through impossible linguistic gymnastics.

In addition to floundering on grammatical grounds, the proposed etymology to derive Cumorah from a Hebrew word for “priest” or “priestess” seems inappropriate. A name whose proposed meaning does not make much sense in context is a sign that the derivation may be wrong. In this case, deriving Cumorah from a hypothetical Hebrew feminine form fraught with highly questionable grammatical problems and derived from a word that means “an (unacceptable) priest” is very problematic. Only with an expanded stretch of the imagination would it be possible to conjure up an explanation of why a prominent hill in the northern territories of Nephite lands would be called “[Unacceptable] Priestess Hill.” It is not impossible, but it is very implausible.

Fifth, if kmr as the root is turned into an abstract noun using the vowel pattern peʿullāh, it would mean “priesthood.” The other root for “priest” in Hebrew, khn, does form an abstract noun using this pattern, kḥummāh, as in Exodus 40:15, Joshua 18:7, 1 Samuel 2:36, and Ezra 2:62. Linguistically, there are no difficulties in going from the analogous but hypothetical *k’murrāh to Cumorah.²² But there is a better possibility. The segholate form mentioned above, melek, “king,” forms the abstract noun mēlūkāh, meaning “kingship.” This Hebrew noun pattern would yield k’mūrāh, a form that would pose no great linguistic problems in explaining Cumorah. The question still remains, though, why would a place known for destruction be called “Hill [of the unacceptable] Priesthood”? The fact that Mormon buried most of the plates in the hill does not explain “priesthood” either. Nevertheless, linguistically, “[Unacceptable] Priesthood Hill” is possible.

In summary, there are several possible explanations for Cumorah. Two, namely a derivation from Gomorrah and a feminine form of kmr meaning “mound,” seem to work well, both from a linguistic standpoint and from etymological appropriateness. Two other proposals do not seem to work well, mainly for linguistic reasons. The last suggestion, “[Unacceptable] Priesthood Hill,” could work linguistically and, with a stretch of the imagination, might be explained appropriately.
Review by Don E. Norton

The rumor was that George Johnson would give a pair of buckskin gloves to any deacon who would read the Book of Mormon. Brother Johnson and I were members of the rural Springdale Ward, Burley Stake (Idaho). This was in the late 1940s, when sacrament meeting attendance in many wards hovered around 20 percent and the Book of Mormon was not a commonly read (or highly esteemed) book in Latter-day Saint-dom. I got about a third of the way through it, then lost interest—and the pleasure of owning a pair of valuable buckskin work gloves.

Indeed, there wasn’t much talk about the Book of Mormon in the church in those days. The first and second years of seminary were Old and New Testament, the third year (seminary was then a three-year program) church history. There was minimal reference to the Book of Mormon in missionary work, in general conferences, in church and auxiliary and Church Educational System curriculums, and in scholarly publications. (For the statistics of this “neglect,” and the reasons for it, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century,” BYU Studies 28/2 [1999]: 7–47.)

Then things began to change. Hugh Nibley’s first article on the Book of Mormon appeared in the Improvement Era in 1948, followed by the serials (later to appear in book form) “Lehi in the Desert” (1950), “The World of the Jaredites” (1951–52), and “There Were Jaredites” (1956–57). Interest in the Book of Mormon rose in 1957: the Melchizedek Priesthood manual that year was Nibley’s An Approach to the Book of Mormon, probably the first widely read commentary on that volume of scripture in the history of the church. Thanks in part to the stimulus of Nibley’s scholarship, along with prodding by some General Authorities and a few members of Brigham Young University’s religion faculty, principally Sidney Sperry and David Yarn, the Book of Mormon began gradually to take its rightful place in the church. My own personal immersion in the Book of Mormon in the early 1950s owes to Glenn Pearson, Reid Bankhead, and Eldin Ricks, whose BYU classes I took and who spearheaded the teaching of the gospel mainly by use of the Book of Mormon. In 1961 that scripture became the required BYU freshman course in religion, though only after extended debate among religion faculty and the administration. Over time, the Book of Mormon became part of the core curriculum of the seminary and institute programs and a routine part of the adult Sunday School curriculum beginning in 1972.

In 1986 President Ezra Taft Benson’s well-known calls to return to the Book of Mormon gave impetus to Book of Mormon scholarship already under way by the Foundation for Ancient...
The Reference Companion contains over 900 alphabetized entries (covering more than 1,500 topics)—brief explanations of names and places from the Book of Mormon, but also more extensive treatments of doctrinal topics, history, key words and phrases, and outlines of books within the Book of Mormon. Some 111 authors contributed to the volume. One of the most valuable discussions is of the chapters of Isaiah that appear in the Book of Mormon—60 pages of outlines and synopses, definitions, contrasts to biblical Isaiah, and modern-day applications.

The book also contains a variety of graphics—pictures, charts, maps, and especially outlines—that complement the written text. The book ends with appendixes and an index of topics. Appendix A, “Study Guide to the Book of Mormon,” matches topics with readings and subject groupings; all entry titles throughout the text, wherever they occur, are cross-referenced by title in small capital letters. Appendix B (only eight pages) contains brief comments on the Book of Mormon by 15 church leaders, from Joseph Smith to Gordon B. Hinckley.

Appendix C consists of about 150 definitions of words from Noah Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language. The implication, a questionable one, is that these definitions represent those Joseph Smith was familiar with as he translated the Book of Mormon. However, no explanation is given as to how or why these words were selected or to what extent they reflect contemporary upstate New York dialect, biblical usage, or Samuel Johnson’s massive 1755 dictionary (Webster borrowed wholesale from Johnson). One of my favorite definitions, that of fellow, which King Noah uses to refer to Abinadi—“Away with this fellow, and slay him” (Mosiah 13:1)—is not included; one of Webster’s definitions is “a man without good breeding or worth; an ignoble man,” perhaps more apt than the more common meaning, simply a neuter-gender companion or associate. Webster’s entry closely follows Johnson’s, as do most of the others in the Reference Companion.

One could argue that the Reference Companion is either overdue or premature. It does represent well our present state of understanding of the Book of Mormon, but much thought and scholarship will continue to emerge. Hugh Nibley confessed to me, at a chance meeting in the 1990s, to having recently learned one of the most basic themes of the Book of Mormon, which a student had just discovered. What remains to be said or discovered may surprise us all. A periodic update of the Reference Companion will be advisable.

The scholarship and quality of the writing (though the book is well edited) are uneven, predictably so, with so many contributors. Perhaps for reasons of convenience, nearly two-thirds of contributors are members of the BYU religion or CES faculties; nearly another quarter are in some way affiliated with BYU. A broader range of thinking and scholarship might well have enriched the volume; an academic mind-set and training can be as much a blinder as an advantage. For example, the discussion of “Book of Mormon, Figures of speech in,” relies on traditional literary categories of images, failing to consider that the richest imagery in the Book of Mormon (at its own insistence—see 2 Nephi 11:4), and in the scriptures in general, consists of types and shadows of features of redemptive patterns, itself a unique category, clearly the most vital one.

An index of all entries by a particular contributor would be helpful, to enable readers to find the contributors whose comments most interest them. (The BYU library is assembling such an index, which will be available on a Web site.) Authors’ initials at the end of each entry are helpful, but the index of contributors (pp. xvi–xix) is alphabetized by...
Review by Sally T. Taylor

Several weeks ago, the Gospel Doctrine teacher in our ward discussed Lehi’s journey through the wilderness. He held the class spellbound with a story of a man from the Near East who had joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The man had written about how Near Eastern customs and geography corresponded to the description of Lehi’s travels in 1 Nephi. The teacher enumerated several specific points and details, bringing the journey into sharp focus. Suggesting that what was known in 1830 about the ancient Arabian Peninsula presented a far different picture from that shown in the Book of Mormon, he concluded that Joseph Smith could not possibly have known what he knew without divine assistance. As the teacher concluded the comparisons, I felt strongly of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

I had a similar verification as I devoured article after article in the Book of Mormon Reference Companion. The Lord asks us to read from the best books. This book more than qualifies to be in that category.

As one thumbs through the book, the first thing that catches the eye is the professional presentation. The quality of paper and binding, the physical presentation of each page, and the easily accessed sections make research with this book a pleasure. Everything is carefully referenced, either by scriptural reference or by bibliographic notation. Each alphabetical section begins with an eye-catching page with floral wallpaper and a quotation from the Book of Mormon with a highlighted word that begins with the letter of that section. I was curious to see if odd letters such as Q, V, or W had scriptural words. Sure enough. There were quick, virgin, and worship. I figured that it was okay not to have an X or Y section, however.

Another immediately stunning feature is the liberal use of illustration. Photos, paintings, portraits, maps, and facsimiles are sprinkled throughout the volume, most in full color. I think it was the first time I’ve ever seen a picture of the Anthon transcript. Although some of the paintings were familiar, others such as Thomas Cole’s Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Liz Lemon Swindle’s Form of a Dove, and Walter Rane’s Alma Arise were new to me and breathtaking.

A masterful overview and introduction begin the body of the Reference Companion, but even before that, a section entitled “About This Volume” gives 11 categories of structure that make the book more accessible to the reader: style and format, characters, places, doctrinal topics, books of the Book of Mormon, historical entries, historical background, general topics, words and phrases, reviews of Isaiah chapters, and appendixes. It also lists the names and affiliations of the 111 contributors to the volume, most of whom are associated with the Church Educational System or Brigham Young University.

The explanation of style and format details the alphabetical listing, the split-column format, and the uses of cross-referencing...
and superscripts. The other categories denote the types of entries in the volume. For example, the explanation under “Characters” notes that the Book of Mormon Reference Companion contains entries on every person named in the Book of Mormon (with a few exceptions in the Isaiah section) as well as on many biblical characters. The comprehensive nature of the volume is astonishing.

After the “Overview and Introduction” is a section titled “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon.” Clearly and concisely, it details the events leading to the plates’ removal from Cumorah, Joseph Smith’s work with them, the opposition he encountered, and the eventual publication of the book are detailed and illustrated with appropriate pictures. At this point in the volume, the entries are alphabetical. Listed in the B’s under “Book of Mormon” is additional information about the Book of Mormon, such as its ancient Near Eastern roots, the Book of Mormon as another testament of Christ, the condemnation for treating the book lightly, early conversions through the Book of Mormon, editions, and so on. A more in-depth historical background here also details the early opposition to the work with pictures and research about that era. It is extremely impressive.

Moving from the B’s through the rest of the alphabet, I found incredibly fascinating information, topics that cover anything and everything a person might want to know about the Book of Mormon. And in most cases, if an entry doesn’t cover the subject in enough detail, it has a bibliography of additional material.

Appropriately, another large section is on Jesus Christ. Again, I found the information beautifully presented, giving a comprehensive look at Christ’s life, teachings, and importance to the human race. Within the subtopics on Jesus Christ are the names by which Christ is known and where each name is found in the Book of Mormon. I was astonished by the sheer number of times Jesus Christ is referred to by different names throughout the Book of Mormon. Also treated here is the Nephite anticipation of the coming of Christ, his premortal appearances, his roles as the Father and the Son, and his second coming.

Within the alphabetical listing are doctrinal topics. Wow! A church-talk handbook at the turn of a page, I thought. No matter what topic the bishop assigns for a sacrament meeting talk, I could be prepared. I thumbed through and was even more impressed by how each topic was presented. Explained first, in a concise sentence, is Latter-day Saint belief about a certain doctrine or principle, followed by a lengthy discussion and scriptural references to support that belief. An example is the term mysteries of God, defined as “truths known through revelation, such as doctrines of the gospel, and the ‘ways’ or divine actions and attributes of God” (p. 577). Further explanation and references follow. The number of doctrinal topics covered is high.

As rich as the clarification of doctrine and principles is, the way in which the prophets of the Book of Mormon are discussed may be even richer. They are briefly described, and then their lives and teachings are discussed, supported by scriptural references. Toward the end of each listing is a summary of that prophet’s teachings in numerical order, followed by scriptural support. I turned immediately to Amulek, a prophet found in Alma 10.

Here was a man blessed with material abundance and social prominence. Although Amulek wouldn’t listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost at first, the Lord finally sent an angel to enlist his help. Like some in the Lord’s church today, I thought, once he gained a firm testimony of the truth, he was able to use his wealth and position to assist in the work. And then he gave it all up to serve the Lord.

The Reference Companion says about Amulek: “a descendant of Nephi and a prominent citizen of Ammonihah, a good and generous man who after conversion became a powerful teacher of the word of Christ” (p. 52). Listed after a more detailed summary of Amulek’s life’s work are seven of his major teachings, such as his testimony of Jesus Christ, his teachings on the atonement and on the resurrection, and so forth. The entries on all Book of Mormon prophets are similarly linked to doctrine.

Following the lead suggested in the “About This Volume” section, I checked how each separate book in the Book of Mormon is outlined. Clearly and effectively. Then I looked at categories that focus on specific people in the Book of Mormon. Many contained additional information, such as places where their names have been found in the Old World. For example, the name Alma is found in the Bar
Kokhba documents (picture on p. 581). Multiple uses of a name are clarified, such as Laman, the brother of Nephi. This name is also applied to Lamanite kings, a captain of Moroni’s army, a city, and a river.

Unusual words or short phrases also are identified. The words jot and tittle are not only defined but also illustrated. I found that illustration extremely helpful. Some words that are slightly unfamiliar to the modern ear or whose definitions have varied from Webster’s 1828 dictionary, such as fain, besom, or bittern, are listed with their earlier meanings in an appendix. Short phrases, such as “voice of the people” or “sanctified in the flesh,” are also explained. A linguistic examination of Hebraisms gives the nonspecialist reader a depth of understanding that usually only scholars can achieve.

As I searched the Reference Companion for specific topics, I couldn’t help pausing on the colorful charts and graphs featured throughout it. One example is the chart titled “Doctrines Taught in the Book of Mormon according to D&C 20:17–36” (p. 237). Verse by verse, the Doctrine and Covenants passage is compared with the Book of Mormon. Twenty doctrines are listed in this chart.

Other charts are equally interesting and helpful, such as those on the chronology of the translation of the Book of Mormon (p. 159), the reign of the judges (p. 474), the weights and measures listed in Alma 11:5–19 (p. 609), and the allegory of Zenos (p. 805). And I was excited to see a genealogy chart of the posterity of Jared. Reading Ether, I’ve often wanted to stop and get out a piece of paper to trace the ancestry. Here it’s done for me.

I’m sure many readers will rejoice at the section comparing the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi with those in the Old Testament. There are not only an outline and a verse-by-verse comparison but also a liberal use of charts showing the similarities and differences between the two versions of Isaiah. Background information and commentary on the section give further assistance. The Malachi section in 3 Nephi receives a similar, if less extensive, treatment.

Throughout the book, historical and doctrinal charts show relationships and clarify time frames. Charts and graphs also show the relationship between modern and ancient gospel concepts, linking the full canon of scripture effectively, and colorful maps show the different eras of ancient Israel’s history.

Another of my favorite sections was that on poetry in the Book of Mormon. As a poet myself, I was drawn to the beautifully presented and accurate analysis noting and illustrating the four kinds of parallelism found in 2 Nephi and Alma.

The book concludes with an appendix containing a study guide for the Book of Mormon, an appendix with statements about the Book of Mormon by leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (with their pictures), and an appendix with the words from Webster’s 1828 dictionary, as mentioned previously.

Overwhelmed by the richness of the book, I knew I had to use a critical eye to find problems or cracks in the facade. First, I looked at the controversial topic of Book of Mormon geography. Many interesting conjectures on the location of Book of Mormon sites have circulated for years. Conflicting accounts make it a touchy area. Which theory was going to be adopted? I was ready to heatedly debate the choice. To my delight, I found that the section was written with great tact. A generalized map not linked to any actual historical locations showed cities and landmarks mentioned in relation to one another, rather than in relation to known geographical areas. The contributors of the volume did not reject any sincere effort of research in this area, but neither did they endorse any. They conclude the section with Elder John A. Widtsoe’s statement “All such studies are legitimate, but the conclusions drawn from them, though they may be correct, must at best be held as intelligent conjectures” (p. 289).

A second controversial topic is the presence of alleged anachronisms in the Book of Mormon—linguistic, cultural, and doctrinal. I had heard the criticism that horses and steel did not exist in pre-Columbian America and that the Book of Mormon was therefore in error. Also some doctrinal concepts such as unpardonable sin are not commonly considered as being taught until the New Testament. Critics have therefore attacked the book’s use of these concepts. Each of these criticisms is effectively defused. We are left to wonder what all the fuss was about.

As a final touchy area, I checked the handling of the
“great and abominable church.” Rather than tying it to any one church either in existence or in ancient times, as an earlier generation of Latter-day Saints tried to do, the entry lists the characteristics of the great and abominable church as found in 1 Nephi and in the book of Revelation. A statement toward the end of the article is particularly helpful: “It is unwise and inaccurate to point to any particular church or political system as the great and abominable church. No single organization meets all the requirements.” The article then lists these requirements and reiterates: “The conclusion is inescapable: no single entity can be the great and abominable church from the beginning of the world to the end. Rather, the role has been played by many different actors in many different times” (p. 314).

So now I’m left trying to find something critical to say about the Book of Mormon Reference Companion, and I’ve come up short. Maybe if I went line by line with my red plastic ruler through the volume, I’d find something to complain about. But maybe not. I frankly have nothing but praise to offer. I am honored to have this book on my bookshelf, where it won’t collect dust because it is consulted so often by everyone in my family, particularly when we are called upon to teach a lesson or give a talk. It is a gold mine of information.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend this book for every home. As a reference book about the Book of Mormon, this volume is a landmark.
ENDNOTES

A Story on Canvas, Paper, and Glass: The Early Visual Images of the Hill Cumorah
Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Cameron J. Packer


2. For a discussion of when, why, and how the New York hill became associated with the Book of Mormon place-names Cumorah and Ramah, as well as with the site where Joseph Smith found the sacred record in 1820, see Cameron J. Packer, "A Study of the Hill Cumorah: A Significant Latter-day Saint Landmark in Western New York" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2002), 38–49. See also John E. Clark, "Archaeology and Cumorah Questions," in this issue of JBMS.

3. For Mormonism, this was called the Wailing Wall; Jews from the adjoining Jewish Quarter came there to pray and to lament the destruction of the Temple [in AD 70 by the Romans]. The great stones of the lower part of the wall have drafted margins in the characteristic Herodian style. They formed part of the retaining wall built by Herod the Great in 20 BC to support the esplanade of the Temple. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 96–97.

4. "The Dome of the Rock, begun in AD 688 and finished in 691, is the first major sanctuary built by Islam. It is also the only one to have survived essentially intact. . . . According to current Arab tradition, the purpose of the Umayyad caliph Abū ʿAbd al-Malik in building the Dome of the Rock was to commemorate Muhammad’s Ascension into heaven after his night journey to Jerusalem (Sura XVII.)." Murphy-O’Connor, The Holy Land, 85.


12. Barber and Howe, Historical Collections, 4.

13. Published in John W. Barber and Henry Howe's Historical Collections of the State of New York: Containing a General Collection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c. Relating to Its History and Antiquities, with Geographical Descriptions of Every Township in the State (New York: John W. Barber and Henry Howe by S. Tuttle, 1841), 582.


15. Beginning in the 1850s, several illustrated histories of the Mormons began to appear. In most cases, representations of the Hill Cumorah did not match descriptions provided by Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery nor the 1841 woodcut by Barber and Howe; see Charles Mackay, The Mormons, or Latter-day Saints. A Contemporary History (London: Office of the National Illustrated Library, 1851), 18; Pomeroy Tucker, Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormons (New York: Appleton, 1867), frontispiece; and T. B. H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons (New York: Appleton, 1873), 19.


17. The earliest views were one-of-a-kind images—daggerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes with no negatives being created for reproduction. Done mostly under the extreme control of a studio setting, images using these photographic methods rarely showed outdoor scenes or events. Later, beginning in 1850, albumen printing became the primary method of making photographic images from glass-plate negatives. The development of the glass-plate negative radically changed the photographic world. By the 1860s, this process was the most popular way of capturing people, places, and events until George Eastman produced the gelatin dry plate method in 1878.


21. Richard G. Oman, Museum of Church History and Art curator, notes, "C. C. A. [Christensen] mentioned that he talked to many eye witnesses." He adds in another communication written later in the day: "I have always wondered if [C. C. A. Christensen] had seen the now missing series of history paintings associated with Philo Dibble. Those would have been some of the earliest visual images of early mid west L.D.S. history." Richard G. Oman to Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, 26 July 2004.


23. C. C. A. did produce additional images of Cumorah. See the photograph of a gathering in the Ephraim Tabernacle around 1894 where C. C. A’s large painting of the Hill Cumorah is visible (Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. Christensen, 1831–1912, p. 25). Additionally, there are two other examples of Moroni delivering the plates to Joseph Smith (see Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. Christensen, 1831–1912, pp. 72 and 85). One of these (found on p. 85), entitled "Moroni Delivering the Plates to Joseph Smith," depicts Moroni handing Joseph Smith the golden plates with a dark Hill Cumorah in the background.


25. Franklin D. Richards, Journal, 9 June 1880, see n. 24 above.

26. Franklin D. Richards, Journal, 10 June 1880; see n. 24 above.

27. Edward Stevenson, Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Stevenson, 1893), 10–11.


29. Published in the Contributor 5 (October 1883), frontispiece.


31. Published in Edward Stevenson, Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Stevenson, 1893), 9.

32. A review of a Palmyra newspaper does indicate that early November 1889 was mild. "The weather this week has been cool, but splendid fall weather nevertheless. . . . Yesterday (Thursday) the sun was as bright as in June, and the air all that goes to make a fall day delicious." See Palmyra Courier, 8 November 1889, 2.

33. The notice of the partnership of Smith and Coatsworth first appears in an 1890 Syracuse city directory. Apparently the partnership dissolved in 1894 or 1895, and in 1902 Coatsworth left Syracuse. See Sarah A. Kozma to Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, personal communication, 29 July 2004.

34. Donor information is found on the back of all three images. Elizabeth Power Smith (Mrs. Arthur C. Smith) donated these images, which at one time belonged to Wayne and Anna Warfield Power. The Powers were married in Syracuse in 1897 and most likely brought the image with them to Ontario County. Why the family collected images
of Cumorah is an intriguing question requiring further research. See David Dilts to Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, personal communication, 28 July 2004; see also Jane Wolfe to Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, personal communication, 30 July 2004.


36. Lamboure produced two copies of each painting. They are both ‘identical except that one is rectangular and the other set is rectangular with an arched top. The sizes are about the same. The perfectly rectangular paintings are on exhibit in the Museum of Church History and Art. The other panels are still in the Salt Lake Temple.” Richard G. Oman to Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, 21 July 2004.


38. “In the Interest of Art,” 2.

39. The painting has been dated usually to 1893; see Richard G. Oman and Robert D. Davis, Images of Faith: Art of the Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 21. However, primary sources, including Wilford Woodruff’s journal cited below and a “Chronological Listing of Paintings, 1869–1899,” compiled by the family and located in the Church Archives, indicate that the painting was completed by the fall of 1892.


41. Alfred Lamboure, Hill Cumorah Painted by Alfred Lamboure, From His Sketches Taken Directly on the Spot (n.p., n.d.), p. 2. A copy of this unpaginated pamphlet is included in the Church Archives.


43. Lamboure, Hill Cumorah Painted by Alfred Lamboure, [p. 1].

44. Lamboure, Hill Cumorah Painted by Alfred Lamboure, [pp. 2–3].


46. Notice the interesting variant on current Mormon usage, “Cumorah Hill” in the Underwood & Underwood caption; see also “Noted Career Ends in Death of P. T. Sexton,” Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, 7 September 1924, [p.1], where the term is used again.


48. George Albert Smith, diary, 26 December 1905, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, microfilm copy in Church Archives. We would like to thank Ronald G. Watt, Church Archives, for providing a transcription of this entry for our use.

49. Edith Smith, diary, 26 December 1905, Church Archives.

50. Edith Smith, diary, 22 December 1905.

51. George Eastman demonstrated the gelatin dry plate method (1878); introduced Eastman American Film, which is the first transparent photographic film common today (1885); produced the Kodak camera with the slogan “You press the button, we do the rest,” creating the birth of snapshot photography (1888); introduced the daylight loading camera, which meant that the photographer could now reload the camera without using a darkroom (1891); changed the company name to Eastman Kodak Company (1892); and produced the “Brownie” camera, selling it for one dollar and the film for it for 15 cents a roll (1900); information taken from the Kodak Web site, www.kodak.com (accessed 31 August 2004).

52. “Bro Goddard attempted to obtain a picture of the [Kirtland Temple] pulpits but was asked to desist. George A asked for the privilege and was refused. Before Bro B had discovered the Kodak had already got in its work,” Edith Smith, diary, 27 December 1905.

53. For an overview of the history of snapshot photography (1888) and a history of snapshot photography (1888); see David Dilts to Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, personal communication, 21 July 2004.

54. “Bro Goddard attempted to obtain a picture of the [Kirtland Temple] pulpits but was asked to desist. George A asked for the privilege and was refused. Before Bro B had discovered the Kodak had already got in its work,” Edith Smith, diary, 27 December 1905.

55. For an overview of the history of snapshot photography (1888) and a history of snapshot photography (1888); see David Dilts to Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, personal communication, 21 July 2004.

56. In 1927 Smith wrote a pageant entitled “Remember Cumorah,” commemorating the 100th anniversary of Joseph Smith receiving the plates. The Saints’ Herald reported that “every branch should make the Sunday following September 22 a day for special service commemorating this event, and where possible the pageant should be presented.” Saints’ Herald 74 (27 July 1927): 884.

57. During nearly 100 years, this medium was one of the ways large groups of people saw images. Only during the second half of the 20th century was it replaced when the Kodachrome three-color process made an 8mm slide less expensive to produce. To view the glass slides represent are either drastically changed or no longer exist and therefore capture a moment in time.

58. Some of the original papers were donated to the Community of Christ Library–Archives, Independence, Missouri (hereafter cited as Community of Christ Library–Archives) in 1988 by Floris M. Hands. After his death in 1996, the remaining slides with relevance to the Community of Christ were donated by Barbara Hands Bernauer, Community of Christ assistant archivist.

59. Form letter sent to RLDS pastors dated 1 December 1930, W. O. Hands Papers, Community of Christ Library–Archives.

60. W. O. Hands to Earl Williamson, 1 April 1931, W. O. Hands Papers, Community of Christ Library–Archives.

61. For a discussion of the 1935 Angel Moroni Monument, see Allen Gerritsen, “The Hill Cumorah Monument: An Inspired Creation of Toledos’s and Stoddard’s” (1881–1965), in this issue of BMJS.


63. Willard was born in Provo, Utah, to George Washington and Elizabeth Baum Bean on 16 May 1868. Willard served four missions before his marriage to Gussie Dee Felts on 3 May 1899 in the Manti Temple. They were the parents of two children, Paul and Phyllis (Autobiography of William Washington Bean: Exploits of the Fighting Parson, 1886–1949, comp. Vicki Bean Topliff (Provo, UT: Vicki Bean Topliff, 2003), 2159–68). When that marriage ended in divorce, Willard married Rebecca Peterson in 1914. To this union four children were born: Palmyra, Alvin, Donna, and Barbara (both born in the Joseph Smith Sr. home). Willard was 46 when called to live in New York and 71 when released.

64. Rebecca Rosetta Peterson Bean was born on 2 April 1891 to Danish convert parents, Ole Johanes and Julia Maria Hansen Peterson. One of her mother’s fondest memories as a young girl still in Denmark was of entertaining the full-time missionaries in her parents’ home. When the family migrated to Utah, one of Rebecca’s regrets was that she would no longer have the opportunity to host missionaries in her home. Little did Rebecca know that she and her husband, as missionaries in New York for 24 years, would entertain more missionaries, church leaders, and other visitors in their home than perhaps any other household in the church.
3. Rebecca Bean, fireside address, Salt Lake City, 5 February 1966 (transcript of audiotape in author’s possession). 2. There is a lingering question of exactly which General Authority was visiting the stake conference in Richmond. Newspapers, stake records, and other sources name President Joseph F. Smith or apostle George Albert Smith, but a few of those sources identify them both. These men had been instrumental in acquiring Latter-day Saint church history sites, were cousins, and were involved in arranging for Bean to be sent on his special mission to New York, any of which could have caused the confusion.

4. Vicki Bean Topliff, Willard Bean, The Fighting Parson, “The new world in its modern immolation,” 1977), provides a careful account of the events but focuses on the plates and says very little about Cumorah; see pp. 58, 69, 70–71. In a different vein, Fawn Brodie, in No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith (Knopf, 1945; 2nd ed., New York: Vintage, 1995), does not even use the word Cumorah when describing the recovery of the Book of Mormon, instead saying only that a rumor was spread through Palmyra that Joseph had “unearthed an extraordinary treasure from the big hill on the turnpike just outside Manchester” (p. 37).


42. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, 6 April 1928, 8.

43. An interesting perspective provided by Willard’s son Alvin was that despite public statements that the Prophet Joseph’s claims about treasures, plates, or angels relative to his reception of the gold plates were untrue and made up, on many nights one could see lights on the hill because people were digging there, trying to find a treasure that they were certain, at least publicly, did not exist. Alvin P. Bean, fireside address, Huntington Beach, California, 5 November 1978 (transcript in author’s possession), 8–9.


45. Virginus Bean, known by family members as Virg, moved to upstate New York with his family from Las Vegas and became a major contributor to the beautification process as well as to the growing Latter-day Saint congregation. He remained in the Cumorah area for more than four years.


50. Hinckley, “Religious Prejudice Allayed.”

51. Willard Bean, untitled manuscript, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives), MS 5617.


53. While living in New York, the Bean family was instrumental in helping a number of people join the Church. In addition to Harold Morgan and two of their children who were very close to the Bean family and were referred to by the Bean children as Uncle Charles and Aunt Maude. William E. and Sarah Morgan and two of their children, as well as Morgan’s parents, were likewise converted about 1923. Their daughter, Genevieve, was scheduled to be baptized at the same time as her family, but she became frightened at the prospect of being immersed in water and ran and hid until the service was over. Two years later she overcame her fear and joined the church through baptism by immersion.

54. Alvin Pliny Bean, “A Modern Mecca,” English composition for a class at Utah State University, October 1937 (copy in the author’s possession), 2.

55. A biographical file on Willard W. Bean in the Church Archives indicates 1 April 1939 as the release date and further states that the Beans were “Transferred to Temple Square Mission, April 1939.” Transcript in the author’s possession.


57. Willard’s granddaughter Vicki Bean Topliff suggests that Willard and Rebecca knew of their impending release but were trying to keep it a secret. See Topliff, The Fighting Parson, 96.


59. Despite the fact that Willard received only minimal formal education as a child, in later life he was not given to incorrect English usage. In this instance he was merely attempting a cute play on words.

60. Rebecca Bean fireside, 4.


64. Bean, “Brief History,” 5.

65. Rebecca Bean, “Fireside Talk Given by Rebecca Rosetta Peterson Bean” (typescript of a fireside address given in Salt Lake City; fall 1964; copy in the author’s possession), 12.


67. Encounters with Cumorah: A Selective, Personal Bibliography Martin H. Raisch

1. For example, Donna Hill, in Joseph Smith: The First Mormon (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), provides a careful account of the events but focuses on the plates and says very little about Cumorah; see pp. 58, 69, 70–71. In a different vein, Fawn Brodie, in No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith (Knopf, 1945; 2nd ed., New York: Vintage, 1995), does not even use the word Cumorah when describing the recovery of the Book of Mormon, instead saying only that a rumor was spread through Palmyra that Joseph had “unearthed an extraordinary treasure from the big hill on the turnpike just outside Manchester” (p. 37). She uses Cumorah in its modern setting only once (and inside quotation marks) when reporting Heber C. Kimball’s description of the cave (p. 41).

2. As the subtitle indicates, this bibliography is both selective and personal. Additional accounts,
longer quotations, and more comprehensive citations to the many reprints of the early documents could have been included, but space constraints did not allow it. I chose many of the accounts not only because they will interest readers of this journal but also because they have become meaningful and memorable to me, since I visited the Hill Cumorah many times during the decade that my family and I lived in upstate New York.

3. James Gordon Bennett, “Mormonism—Religious Fanaticism—Church and State Party,” New York Morning Courier and Enquirer, 31 August and 1 September 1831. His original article was reprinted, summarized, paraphrased, or embellished by many newspapers. A partial list includes the following: Vermont Gazette, 13 September 1831 (adapted and paraphrased); Cleveland Ohio Herald, 15 September 1831 (reprinted; Boston Christian Register, 24 September 1831 (reprinted); St. Johnsbury (Vt.) Farmer’s Herald, 23 October 1831 (paraphrased, with additional material from other sources) and 18 January 1832 (reprinted, with corrections); and New York Churchman, 4 February 1832 (paraphrased, with corrections). It also appeared in the Salem (Ma) Gazette in late 1831 or early 1832 and the Philadelphia U.S. Gazette in January 1832. I have not been able to track down all the precise dates.

A modern reprint can be found in Leonard J. Arrington, “James Gordon Bennett’s 1831 Report on ‘The Mormonites.’” BYU Studies 10/3 (Spring 1970): 53–64. Arrington also provides additional glimpses from entries in Bennett’s diary. For 7 August 1831, Bennett noted “the Golden Bible hill where there is a hole 30 or forty feet deep in the side—6 feet diameter—dug among and the chest filled his approach.” He also added to his description that the hill had “several fine orchards on the east—and fine farms on the west.”


6. Letter VII appeared in Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate 1/10 (July 1835): 55–59 and Times and Seasons 2/12 (15 April 1841): 377–80. Letter VIII appeared in Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate 1/30 (October 1835): 195–202 and Times and Seasons 2/13 (1 May 1841): 391–97. These letters, or lengthy portions of them, were reprinted in several other publications as well, including the early church magazine The Gospel Reflector and even some non-LDS newspapers. Extracts appeared in a pamphlet by Orson Pratt titled An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records (Edinburgh: 1840), beginning on page 8. All the letters were reprinted in Liverpool in 1844 in a pamphlet titled Letters by Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps on the Origin of the Book of Mormon and the Rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Cowdery’s description of the Hill Cumorah begins on page 34. The pamphlet is available in digital form via the catalog of Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library in Provo, as are most of the other printings.


15. Andrew Jensen and Edward Stevenson, Infancy of the Church: An Elaborate and Detailed Description of Persons, Places and Incidents connected with the Early Rise and Progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1889).


17. Jensen and Stevenson, Infancy of the Church, 39.


25. About 40 photographs, including one of the Hill Cumorah, appeared in Birth of Mormonism in Picture: Scenes and Incidents in Early Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1909), with narrative and notes by John Henry Evans. The caption for the photograph of the hill on page 36 reads, “This is the Hill Cumorah, called ‘Mormon Hill’ by those who live in the neighborhood. The photograph shown in the cut is without doubt the best ever taken of this historic spot. It shows the road which Joseph must have traveled many times on his visits to the hill. The plates of the Book of Mormon [sic], deposited in a stone box under a stone of considerable size, were found on the west side not far from the top.”


27. Quoted in Holzapfel, Cottle, and Stoddard, Church History in Black and White, 167. Three views of the hill from the north, showing it almost devoid of trees, plus one taken from its summit, are reproduced in the book.

28. President Ivins’s address was reprinted in Improvement Era, June 1928, 674–81. The quotation is on page 675. This publication includes a photograph of the Hill Cumorah taken in 1920.


33. E. Cecil McGavin, Cumorah’s “Gold Bible” (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940), iii.

34. McGavin offers a brief bibliographical note that does not include any works by the “prominent students of the subject” from which his “facts” apparently derive. It is impossible to know if his extracts are accurately quoted or even if they derive from authentic sources.


36. I am certain that other noteworthy items could be added to this bibliography and welcome suggestions from readers. I can be reached via the FARMS office.

Cumorah’s Cave
Cameron J. Packer

1. The 10 cave accounts presented in this paper are found in William Horne Dame, Journal of the Southern Exploring Company, 1854–1858, Iron County, UT, 14 January 1854; David Edwards, Papers, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah; Heber C. Kimball, in Journal of Discourses, 4:105; Brigham Young, Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 5 May 1867, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter Church Archives); Wilford Woodruff, Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 11 December 1869, 6:508–9; Elizabeth Kane, A Gentle Account of Life in Utah’s Dixie, 1872–73: Elizabeth Kane’s St. George Journal (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Tanner Trust Fund, 1995), 75–76; Jesse Nathaniel Smith, The Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith: Six Decades in the Early West; Diaries and Papers of a Mormon Pioneer, 1834–1896, ed. Oliver R. Smith (Provo, UT: Jesse N. Smith Family Association, 1970), 217, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University (hereafter BYU Special Collections); Heber C. Young, in Journal of Discourses, 19:37–39; Edward Stevenson, Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Edward Stevenson, 1893), 14–15, BYU Special Collections; David Whitmer, found in P. Wilhelm Pischel, “Interview with David Whitmer,” Deseret Evening News, 16 August 1878, 2; Orson Pratt, “Cumorah,” The Contributor 3/12 (September 1882): 357. Orson Pratt often referred to the cave in Cumorah but not with specific reference to Joseph Smith and others entering to return the plates. One of Pratt’s accounts, however, is on page 48–49. Several of the other references to the cave that are not included in this article are found in Journal of

Another source for Pratt’s accounts is supposedly the Quorum of the Twelve Minutes, 6 May 1849, but I have not been able to confirm this. Brigham Young’s record of that date, however, is interesting to note: “I met with President Willard Richards and the Twelve on the 6th. We spent the time in interesting conver-
sation upon old times, Joseph, the plates, Mount Cumorah, treasures and records known to be hid in the earth, the gift of seeing, and how Joseph obtained his first seer stone” (Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 6 May 1849, Church Archives). See also Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 May 1849.

2. Most of the cave accounts mention Oliver Cowdery as a participant. Although Cowdery is not formally recorded as having shared this experi-
ence in speaking or writing, there is one obscure line from Cowdery that might refer to the cave experience. In describ-
ing his feelings about the Hill Cumorah, Cowdery wrote, “In my estimation, certain places are dearer to me for what they now contain than for what they have contained” (Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate, October 1835, 2:196; emphasis in original).

3. It is interesting that his account differs from the others regarding the exact location of the cave, and yet it should be remembered that Whitmer’s statement “not far away from that place” may have been referring to the exact place where the plates were found, and therefore the cave, which was nearby, could have still been in the hill proper.

Another possibility is that, for some reason, Whitmer was thinking of Miner’s Hill, which is just north of the hill Cumorah and was said to feature a cave dug by Mormons; see Cameron Packer, “A Study of the Hill Cumorah: A Significant Latter-
day Saint Landmark in Western New York” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2002), 59–62.

4. For a review of these missing records, see Monte S. Nyman, “Other Ancient American Records Yet to Come Forth,” JBMS 10/1 (2001): 52–61.


16. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, “Therefore, What?” (ad-

17. Account 10, by Orson Pratt, also mentions an angelic guardian.


20. It is also interesting to note that when Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith on 21 September 1823 and revealed the existence of the Nephi record, “he informed [Joseph] of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence” (Joseph Smith—History 1:45). Perhaps the sword in the cave symbolized that these judgments were at hand.

The Hill Cumorah Pageant: A Historical Perspective Gerald S. Argetsinger

1. The Passion Play of Oberam-
mergau is the world’s most en-
during and famous play depict-
ing the Passion of Jesus Christ. It has been presented regularly since AD 1634 in Bavaria.

2. Charles W. Whitman, “A History of the Hill Cumorah Pageant (1937–1964) and an Explanation of the Dramatic Development of the Text of America’s Witness for Christ” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1967); Randy V. Hansen, “Development of the Cumorah Pageant” (honors the-

Designing Costumes for the Hill Cumorah Pageant Rory R. Scanlon

1. See Margot Blum Schevill, Costume as Communication: Ethnographic Costumes and Textiles from Middle America and the Central Andes of South America in the Collections of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, Bristol, Rhode Island (Bristol, RI: Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, 1986), 9.


3. “There is a tendency by some Christians to assume too much from archaeology. Sometimes the words conform, prove, authen-
ticate, and substantiate can be employed. It can be proved that historical conditions were such that Solomon could have been as powerful a king as the Bible says he was; but it does not prove that God gave Solomon wisdom. It can be fairly well substantiated that there was a census when Jesus was born; but this confir-
mation hardly proves his divin-
ity. No archaeological evidence will ever prove the atonement. It must be recognized that there is a clear separation between historical and theological proof.” Alfred J. Hoerth, Archaeology and the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, ML: Baker Books, 1998), 20.


9. See Mormon 1:8–9; Jacob 1:14.

A New Beginning for the Pageant: 1948 to 1951

Harold I. Hansen

1. J. Karl Wood was called to direct the Hill Cumorah Pageant in 1939.

2. Thorpe B. Isaacs, in Conference Report, October 1949, 156.


“Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder”: Music Inspired by the Hill Cumorah

Roger L. Miller

1. “An Angel from on High,” Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 13; hereafter Hymns.

2. Latter-day Saint children might also think of one of their favorite songs: “The Golden Plates Lay Hidden,” Children’s Songbook of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 86.

3. On summer evenings in July and August, thousands gather on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah to
see “America’s Witness for Christ.” The pageant and its history are discussed elsewhere in this issue of JBMS.

3. Surprisingly little folk music has surfaced that deals specifically with the Hill Cumorah, but folk music from Joseph Smith’s time and place may be useful in providing a cultural context for the events surrounding the restoration of the gospel. Latter-day Saint composer Lisa Despain has begun work in this area. Popular music has produced only a few samples of music dealing with Cumorah; see, for example, Liz Smith, “Road from Cumorah,” from A Prayer from the Heart, CD (Covenant Communications, 1996).

4. A copy of the painting is found in the Museum of Church History and Art at Temple Square in Salt Lake City. The recording project, including scores and photographic plates, is published as Mormoniana (New York: Mormon Artists Group Press, 2004).

5. The rail fence refers, of course, to Joseph Smith’s account of the morning after the angel Moroni’s visits when he failed in his attempt to cross a fence on his way home (see Joseph Smith—History 1:48).


7. Ramah is the Jaredite name for the ancient hill Cumorah. Another of Curtis’s poems, “Historic Ramah’s Verdant Slope” (Improvement Era 31 [1928], 245), incorporates this name, expanding upon the topics of Jaredite and Nephite destruction and the revelation of the Book of Mormon plates to Joseph Smith.


9. “Hark! ye mortals. Hiss! be still. Voices from Cumorah’s hill Break the silence of the tomb,” etc., but note the third stanza: “Thrones shall totter, Babel fall, Satan reign no more at all; Saints shall gain the victory, Truth prevail o’er land and sea, Gentile tyrants sink to hell! Now’s the day of Israel!” Set to a tune from Handel’s Judas Macabaeus, it was understandably dropped after the 1927 hymnal. Other early hymns dwelt on the plight of the “Red Man,” as, for example, “O Stop and Tell Me, Red Man,” by W. W. Phelps. See Davidson, “Latter-day Saint Hymnody,” 20–21.

10. A text such as Pratt’s “The Morning Breaks” (Hymns, 1) owes its pride of place to (apparently) self-evident restoration and Book of Mormon allusions. However, what might be seen by Latter-day Saints as clear-cut Hill Cumorah symbolism, “Angels from heav’n and truth from earth / Have met, and both have record borne.,” could also easily have come from Psalm 85:11: “Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.” While this biblical source does not prevent the Latter-day Saint interpretation, it also opens a wider field of possibilities. Thus, Davidson’s study did not count it as a specifically Book of Mormon hymn.

11. The first six stanzas were remained in Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 24th ed. (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1905). Sometimes attributed to “Dr. Rippon,” an English Baptist clergyman whose well-known “A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors . . .” (1787) went through 27 printings (including an American edition printed in Philadelphia in 1820), Pratt’s version was undoubtedly a paraphrase. Its original tune, “Advent,” like many hymns and sacred songs of the time, bore rows from secular tradition, here reminiscent of an 18th-century English country dance. The tune was rewritten for the 1927 hymnal (Latter-day Saint Hymns, no. 224) by Tabernacle organist Edward P. Kimball but was dropped in the 1944 hymnal. Kimball’s resetting combined the first six stanzas into three.

12. This Parley P. Pratt hymn was found in J. C. Little and G. B. Gardner’s A collection of sacred hymns, for the use of the Latter-day Saints (Nauvoo, IL: n.p., 1844), 65–66.


16. Parley P. Pratt hymn was found in J. C. Little and G. B. Gardner’s A collection of sacred hymns, for the use of the Latter-day Saints (Nauvoo, IL: n.p., 1844), 65–66.


20. Rodenberry, “What Do We Have from Cumorah?,” in Janice Kapp Perry, Inspirational New Hymns for Choir & Home, vol. 2 (Prime Recordings Inc., 2000), 13. Acknowledging Elder Packer’s challenge, Perry undertook a project in 1997 to write 100 hymns on texts by various Latter-day Saint poets (see her introduction to this collection). In this case the distinctive resemblance of her music to the waltz tune “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” tends to distract from the hymn’s overall effectiveness.


22. Beid Nibley, “Come unto Christ,” for chorus and organ (2000); see also settings by Donald Ripplinger, Newell Dayley, Lorenzo Mitchell, etc. Not all works of this title are focused on Moroni’s words; for example, a similar text can be found in Omni 1:26, and Merrill Jensen’s oratorio Come unto Christ, commissioned by Ricks College (unpublished, 1999), centers on the conversion of Alma the Younger.

23. See also 2 Nephi 3:18–21; Isaiah 29:4: “And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.”

24. Henry E. Giles, “The Truth Has Spoken from the Dust: Chorus, Chant, Chorale, Finale,” in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. From the title page: “For the one hundredth anniversary celebration of the delivery of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated to the prophet Joseph Smith, September 22nd, 1827–1927.”

25. The afternoon session of the Salt Lake Stake conference in the Tabernacle (1927) also featured the anniversary.


28. Compare 2 Nephi 3. Ezekiel 37 becomes an extension of the “voice from the dust” metaphor. The “Joseph” theme is carried further in see 16, 10 and 16 of Bradshaw’s oratorio The Restoration, premiered in 1974 by the BYU Oratorio Choir.


30. Some contemporary composers find that there is no place for such music in their day Saint culture, leaving them isolated and unable to contribute.


32. Truman G. Madsen, “B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon,” in BYU Studies 19/3 (Spring 1979): 436. It was through Robert’s efforts, during his five years (1922–1927) as president of the Eastern States Mission, that the church purchased the Hill Cumorah, the Smith Family Farm, the Sacred Grove, and the Whitmer Farm. See David F. Bowditch’s study in this issue. It should also be noted that, as early as 1919, Apostle Melvin J. Ballard communicated his hope that someone would compose an oratorio in the Book of Mormon to the young Latter-day Saint composer Leroy Robertson, whose Oratorio from the Book of Mormon contains the lines of music to the song “Hear from Cumorah,” in Janice Kapp Perry, Inspirational New Hymns for Choir & Home, vol. 2 (Prime Recordings Inc., 2000), 63. See Marian Robertson Wilson, “Leroy Robertson and the Oratorio from the Book of Mormon: Reminiscences of a Daughter,” JBMS 8/2 (1999): 133.


34. Some contemporary composers find that there is no place for such music in their day Saint culture, leaving them isolated and unable to contribute.

35. Madsen, “B. H. Roberts,” 436. The 1930 Centennial was also the occasion for a large, partially sponsored pageant, “The Message of the Ages,” with music for soloists, chorus, and orchestra composed and arranged by Leroy Robertson. The pageant premiered on 8 April 1930 in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. It depicted the dispensations of the gospel, culminating in the revelation given to Joseph Smith, including, of course, his encounters with Moroni and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

36. The original score has been revised several times to conform to changes in the pageant; Gates has also adapted it as Symphony No. 2, “Scenes from the Book of Mormon.”


38. Larson, Carianton and Moroni, 5–7, passim.
39. Some may regard this aspect of Clark's assessment as overly enthusiastic. Larson's language is epic in cast, not “life-like” in the sense of common, everyday speech. But it is life-affirming and powerful in its ability to project the terrible conflicts that come to each of us as a result of our being “free to choose liberty and eternal life, . . . or to choose captivity and death” (2 Neph 2:27).
40. Larson, Coriantumr, 71.
41. Ibid., 7.
42. Merrill Bradshaw, Coriantumr (script copy, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University). Taylor's prolific output also includes several symphonies with Book of Mormon themes, including symphonies 4 and 7, which contain excerpts from Coriantumr.
43. Darwin Wolford, The Land of Joseph, BYU–Idaho, Dept. of Music (Rexburg, ID: unpublished, 1976). Wolford was one of a number of Robertson's composition students. Robertson taught at BYU and the University of Utah in the 1930s through the 1960s.
44. There is yet another possibility, one that is always a potential problem when attempting to deal with a fictional mise-en-scène. Perhaps the anachronisms and misconceptions in Larson's script, laid bare through later research in the second half of the 20th century, ultimately made him uncomfortable with the material.
45. Moroni was the first of three theatrical works sponsored by the Promised Valley Playhouse (at that time a cultural appellation of the church) to educate and inspire through music and drama. The second was on the life of Christ and the third on Joseph Smith.
46. Prefatory note from the script published by the Promised Valley Playhouse, Salt Lake City, 1977.
48. Another recent addition to the genre is Meredith R. Taylor's Oratorio from the Hill Cumorah Monument, published in 2003, an opera on the well-known Book of Mormon prophet.
50. Former Tabernacle organist Robert Cundick's doctoral thesis, for example, was an extended work for chorus and orchestra, “The Song of Nephi” (1955), completed under Robertson's tutelage at the University of Utah. Cundick had copied the parts for the Oratorio from the Book of Mormon and thus had a first-hand acquaintance with the score.
51. Rowan Taylor, Coriantumr, manuscript copy, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
52. Torleif S. Knaphus, “Work Done for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.
53. Ibid., 7.
57. Jeff Goodrich, I Heard Him Come and Other Songs about the Savior (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book).
58. Dvorak inspiration for this piece is attributed to the composer by John 1:11–13 and Doctrine and Covenants 93:1–2, but the doctrine of Christ as taught in Moroni 10:32 seems even more apt and is certainly reflected in the text.

Look Once Again at Cumorah’s Hill: The Poets’ View

Louise Helps

1. These poems are similar to each other. One was clearly a reworking of the other.

The Hill Cumorah Monument: An Inspired Creation of Torleif S. Knaphus

Allen P. Gerritsen

1. Torleif S. Knaphus, “Description of the Hill Cumorah Monument,” ca. 1935, in possession of the author. In a few instances, the punctuation and spelling in quotations from Knaphus's writings have been normalized.
3. Personal History of Torleif Knaphus, as dictated to Linda Knaphus, 1957, in the author’s possession, 3.
8. Torleif S. Knaphus, “Work Done for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” dated unknown, list in the author’s possession.
10. Concerning the identity of this angel, Rebecca Bean remarked, “I say ‘angel,’ [but] I don’t know. I asked Brother Knaphus, when he told me the story, if it was the Angel Moroni that came to him. He said, ‘Sister Bean, that’s my secret.’ But I really feel that it was the Angel Moroni who came to [him]” (Rebecca Bean, fireside address given in Salt Lake City in 1964. This address appears under the title “The Mormons Return to Palmyra” at http://joda.cis.temple.edu/~nichols/drhaves/halmyra3.html [accessed July 2004]).
11. Rebecca Bean, fireside address.
12. According to Rebecca Bean’s account, the angel, in response to Torleif’s prayer about which of the seven drawings to take to the Brethren, told him which drawing was the right one. This raises the question of why Torleif presented all seven drawings to the Brethren and not just the designated one. This matter is resolved in the following account: “When the sculptor inquired [of the angel] how he should confront the Brethren with this choice [the sketch that the angel’s finger pointed to] (inasmuch as they were the ones making the decision), he was instructed that they would choose the one the Lord had chosen.” Rand H. Packer, History of Four Mormon Landmarks in Western New York: The Joseph Smith Farm, Hill Cumorah, the Martin Harris Farm, and the Peter Whitmer, Sr., Farm (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970), 31–32.
16. The text on the plaque is nearly identical to Torleif’s description that appears in his “Description of the Hill Cumorah Monument,” 10:32 seems even more apt and is certainly reflected in the text.

The Geologic History of Hill Cumorah

Michael J. Dorais

1. The 1815 Tambora eruption altered weather patterns around the world, causing the “year without a summer” in 1816 and extensive crop failures in New England.


18. Kamåru in the D-stem verb signifies heaping up corpses and in the N-stem verb heaping up mounds and corpses (CAD K, 112–14). Additionally, the noun form kumårû means "sum, total, and the sorting of the date harvest" (CAD K, 535), while in Late Babylonian only kumårû can mean "defeat, annihilation" (CAD K, 112). Kimru means a "layering" or "mound," as of dates for further ripening (von Soden, Akkadisches Handwörterbuch, 478).

19. This view has been defended by Ricks and Tvedtnes, who point to the Hebrew noun pattern per’ullåh but apply it to the meaning "priest"; see their "Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names," 256. The masculine place-name kumårû in northern Mesopotamia may be derived from the root kør. It is possible that this name is Amorite, a Northwest Semitic language like Hebrew. For this suggestion, see Jean-Marie Durand, "La Culture Matériel a Mari (I): Le Bijou HUB-TIL-LÁ/GUR-MÉ," MARI VI, pp. 146n78 and 149. (I owe this reference to my former student Ed Stratford.)

20. That kører is a segholate form can be demonstrated from Hebrew alone. The segholate noun forms in Hebrew are so named because they contain a seghol vowel between the second and third consonants in the masculine singular. These segholate noun forms derived originally from a hatl, kitl, or kutl noun pattern. Kører would then have come from the latter of these related noun forms. The only other possible form from which kører might be derived is a masculine singular participle. But kører cannot be a Hebrew masculine participle. When kører becomes plural in Hebrew, it loses its first vowel. Participles never lose their first vowel in the masculine plural form. In addition, participles normally have the Hebrew vowel sere and not a seghol as the second vowel in the masculine singular form.

21. The only way to preserve both the first and the second vowels would be to posit the hypothetical original feminine plural form but without the final t, a very unlikely scenario. Thus, the hypothetical Hebrew form of the feminine plural, with nominative case ending, would be *kumåråtu, based on analogy with the feminine form malåkåtu. However, Hebrew feminine plurals do not look like this, but rather, as in the case at hand, *kîmarøt. This latter form is derived through the following changes: with the loss of the case marker, the first vowel has been reduced in biblical Hebrew to a shewa, possibly because of the shift of the stress; the second vowel has been lengthened because it appears in an open syllable; and, finally, the long, plural, feminine vowel marker, because of the so-called Canaanite shift, has changed from å to ø. But with all of these changes, the final t would not have been lost; and Camorah has no final t.

22. For the suggestions so far in this paragraph, see Ricks and Tvedtnes, "Hebrew Origin of Book of Mormon Place Names," 256–57.